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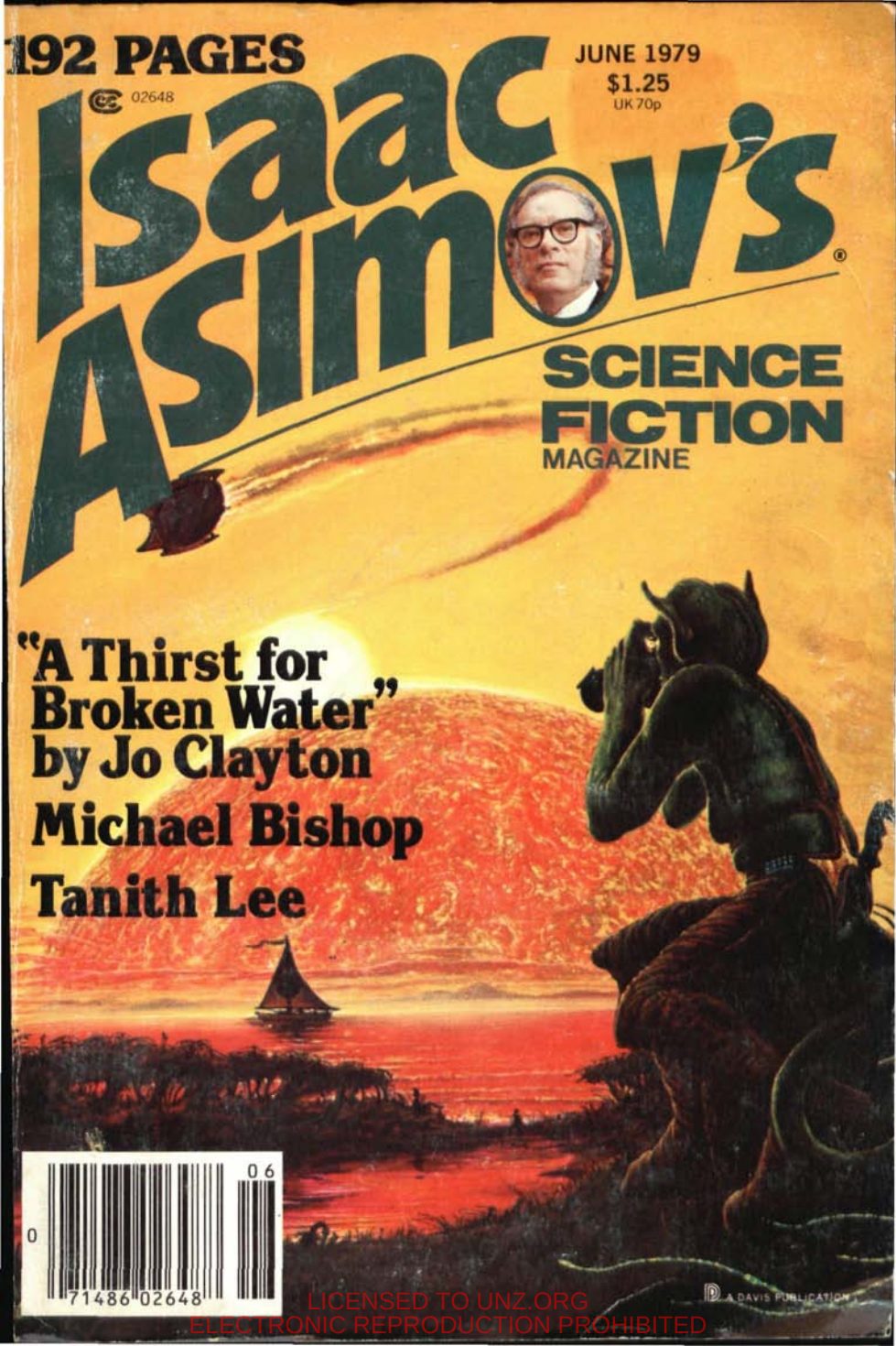

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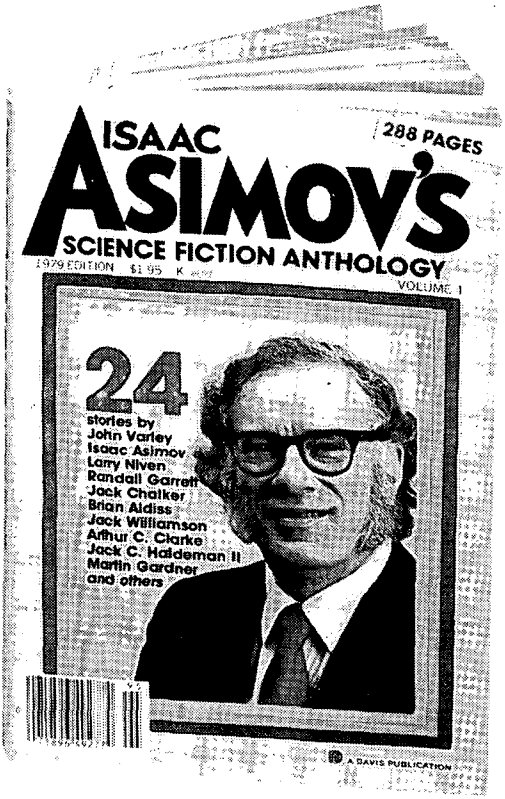

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EDITORIAL: GOLDEN AGE AHEAD

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

It seems to be an almost unvarying habit among human beings to find golden ages in the past, both in their own personal lives and in their societies.

That's only natural. In the first place, there's something to it—at least in our personal lives. To those of us who are elderly (or even in their late youth, as I am) there is no question but that there are memories of a time when we were younger and stronger and thinner and more vigorous and less creaky and could perform more frequently and grow tired less frequently and so on. And if that isn't golden, what is?

In general, this is naturally extrapolated to the point where whatever society was like in our teen-age years is our view of what society *ought* to be like. Every change since then is viewed as a deterioration, a degeneration, an abomination.

Then, too, there are the falsities of memory, which cast a delicious haze over the past, eliminating the annoyances and frustrations and magnifying the joys. Add to that the falsities of history which inevitably produce a greater emphasis on heroism, on dogged determination, on civic virtue; while overlooking squalor, corruption, and injustice.

And in the sub-universe of science fiction, isn't this also true? Doesn't every reader who has been reading for a decade or two remember a "golden age"? Doesn't he complain that science fiction stories aren't as good as they used to be? Doesn't he dream of the classics of the past?

Of course. We all do that. I do it, too.

There is one "Golden Age of Science Fiction" that has actually been institutionalized and frozen in place, and that is the period between 1938 and 1950, with its peak years from 1939 to 1942.

John W. Campbell, Jr. became editor of *Astounding Stories* in 1938, changed its name to *Astounding Science Fiction*, changed its style, and found new writers or encouraged older writers to expand their horizons. He helped develop myself, L. Sprague de Camp, Les-

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ter del Rey, Theodore Sturgeon, Eric Frank Russell, Hal Clement, Arthur C. Clarke, and many others; and all produced stories that are among the great all-time classics of the genre. In particular, in 1939 Robert A. Heinlein and A. E. Van Vogt both burst on the scene with crackerjack stories.

Let's, however, take a closer and unimpassioned look at the Golden Age.

To begin with, how was it viewed in its own time? Did all the readers sit around, saying, "Golly, gee, wow, I'm living through a Golden Age!"?

You'd better not believe it. Sure, the young readers who had just come into the field were fascinated, but the older readers who had been reading since the late 1920s were not. Instead, they frequently talked of the "good old days" and longed for *their* golden age of the Tremaine *Astounding,* which ran from 1933 to 1938.

I was one of the old fossils, as a matter of fact. Much as I liked the stories of the Campbell era and much as I enjoyed contributing to them myself, it was of the earlier 1930s that *I* dreamed. It wasn't Heinlein that was the epitome to me of science fiction (though I recognized his worth)—it was Jack Williamson's "The Legion of Space"; it was E. E. Smith's "Galactic Patrol"; it was Nat Schachner's "Past, Present, and Future"; it was Charles R. Tanner's "Tumithak of the Corridors."

Even at this very day there is an organization called "First Fandom" (to which I belong), and only those can belong to it who were science fiction fans *before* 1938.

And if there were golden ages before the Golden Age, there were also golden ages to still-younger readers *after* the Golden Age. Indeed, Terry Carr has just published an excellent anthology of stories from 1939 through 1942 entitled *Classic Science Fiction: The First Golden Age.*

How many more have there been? I should guess that there has been one for every three-year interval since—to one group of readers or another.

Think again? Were the stories of your golden age really golden? Have you re-read them lately?

I have re-read the stories of my own golden age and found the results spotty indeed. Some of the stories I slavered over as a teenager turned out to be impenetrable and embarrassing when I tackled them again. A few ("Tumithak of the Corridors" for one) held up very well, in my opinion.

It was clear to me, though, that the general average of writing

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forty years ago was much lower than the general average later. That, in fact, seems to me to have been a general rule. Magazine science fiction over the last half-century has steadily risen above and away from its pulpish origins.

That means me, too. I imagine that many people who drooled over "Nightfall," *The Foundation Trilogy,* and *I, Robot* in their teens find some of the gloss gone when they re-read them in their thirties. (Fortunately for myself, a substantial number do not—and there are always new teen-agers entering the field and ready to be dazzled.)

Why has the quality of writing gone up?

For one thing, the competition to science fiction has gone. The pulp magazines are gone. The slick magazines scarcely publish fiction. Whereas, some decades back, science fiction magazines—with their small circulation and even smaller financial rewards—could not compete in the market place and could gain only raw enthusiasts, there is now comparatively little else for a beginning writer to do, few other places for him to go.

The competition for space in the science fiction magazines is therefore keener, so that better natural talents reach their pages—and set higher standards for other novices to shoot at.

I doubt, for instance, that I could possibly have broken into science fiction in 1979 with nothing more than the talent I had when I broke into the field in 1939. (Nor need this discourage new writers—they are learning in a better school in 1979 than I did in 1939.)

There is also greater knowledge of science today.

The writers of my own golden age knew very little science that they didn't pick up from the lurid newspaper stories of the day (equivalent to learning about sex in the gutter).

Nowadays, on the other hand, even those science fiction writers who are not particularly educated in science and who don't particularly use science in their stories nevertheless know much more about science and use it far more skillfully (when they do) than did the creaky old giants of the past. The new writers can't help it. We now live in a society in which science saturates every medium of communication and the very air we breathe—and the growing ranks of capable science writers see to it that the communications are of high quality.

What do we face then?

We will have stories by better writers, dealing with more exciting and more subtle themes in a more intelligently scientific manner.

Need we worry that it will all come to an end, that science is

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outpacing science fiction and putting us all out of a job?

No! What the scientists are doing is exactly the reverse. They are providing us with fresh, new gimmicks daily: new ideas, new possibilities.

In just the last few days, I have read about the discovery of gases in Venus's atmosphere which seem to show that Venus could not have been formed in the same way Earth was. I have read about the possibility of setting up a modulated beam of neutrinos that could allow communication *through* the Earth instead of around it. I have read that the Sun may have a steadily ticking internal clock with the irregularities of the sunspots a superficial modification—but what the clock is and why the modification, we do not know.

Each of these items can serve as the starting point for a story that might not have been possible to write last year, let alone thirty years ago. And they will be written with the skill and expertise of today.

These are exciting times for society, for science, for science fiction, for science fiction writers, for science fiction readers. George, Joel, and I are having more fun putting this magazine together all the time; and, we hope, you are having more fun reading it all the time.

Why not? There's a Golden Age ahead!

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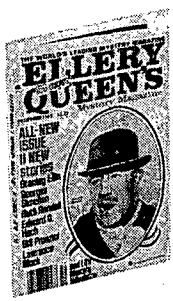

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ON BOOKS
by Baird Searles

Gloriana by Michael Moorcock, Avon, $4.95 (paper).
The Serpent by Jane Gaskell, Pocket Books, $1.95 (paper).
The Dragon by Jane Gaskell, Pocket Books, $1.75 (paper).
Atlan by Jane Gaskell, Pocket Books, $1.95 (paper).
The City by Jane Gaskell, Pocket Books, $1.75 (paper).
Some Summer Lands by Jane Gaskell, St. Martin's, $8.95, Pocket Books (June), $1.95 (paper).
The Faded Sun: Shon'Jir by C. J. Cherryh, DAW, $1.95 (paper).
A Princess of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
The Gods of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
The Warlord of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
Thuvia, Maid of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
The Chessmen of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).
The Master Mind of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Del Rey, $1.95 (paper).

Reviewing books is not, as so many people think, all free copies and taste-making. Sounding off about the negative aspects would be unprofessionally whiny of me, and I won't, but sometimes there are positive negatives (you should pardon the paradox) that are infuriating and delightful at the same time. There is one such this month: two absolutely wonderful novels that are almost indescribable. But I can but try . . .

Michael Moorcock has over the years both awed and infuriated us readers, the one by his amazing prolificacy and flow of invention, the other by a certain sloppy, ground-out quality in his work that reminds one of what Truman Capote said about Jack Kerouac: "That's not writing; that's typing."

The first two Elric books were wonderful, setting a pattern for almost all the sword-and-sorcery to follow (nearly all of which was inferior); and certainly his science fiction has been innovative in its hipness and revolt against some of the stodgier qualities of

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"classic" SF. But I, at least, have felt as though I were waiting for him to really deliver a major work. Now, with *Gloriana,* he's done it.

Gloriana is the Valkyrie-like queen of Albion, 6 feet 6 inches of glorious womanhood. Albion, a country that bears a suspicious resemblance to Britain, is an island nation with a capital city called London. There is Gloriana's palace, a huge, almost endless jumble of buildings that houses her court fo thousands of people, not to mention a hidden population of other thousands who live in the buried-below-ground remnants of the most ancient edifices and between the walls.

Albion's empire is enormous, stretching from the protectorates of Hindoostan and Cathay to the large New World colony of Virginia, which extends to the Pacific. Rivals to Albion include the Tatar Empire, Iberia, Arabia, and Greater Poland.

This may be one of the most delicious Alternate Earths ever invented. And we are given a definite clue to the fact that it *is* an Alternate Earth by Gloriana's Councillor of Philosophy, the magus Doctor Dee, who is preoccupied with what he thinks of as parallel spheres of reality, and even claims to have encountered travellers from those other spheres, including one Adolphus Hiddler, ("a poor lunatic who claimed to have been a king over all the German states . . .")

The curious thing is that aside from Doctor Dee's questionable experiments, there is not one fantastic event in the plot of *Gloriana.* Let's see if I can clarify that without getting into a tedious semantic discussion and definition of fantasy (and science fiction as a subgenre of fantasy).

Everything in Gloriana's world is known to us; there are no spaceships or elves, no alien invaders or supernatural thingies. The story is an intricate weave of plot and counterplot, intrigue and a grand attempt to subvert the Empire and the Golden Age of Gloriana's reign, and deliver it and her into the hands and bed of the Grand Caliph Hassan of Arabia. The resulting chaos even brings to light and involves the hidden denizens of the palace. I kept wondering how Moorcock was going to resolve this incredible and wonderful farrago; he actually manages to do so with a climax of revelations, reversals, friends turned enemies, villains turned heros, weddings, beddings and conquests that makes the reader want to stand up and cheer.

So why is this a candidate for instant fantasy classic? The fantasy is implicit in the setting and the characters, which are some-

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times grotesque, often surreal; they *are* fantasy. The closest equivalent I can come up with is Mervyn Peake's work of genius, the Gormenghast trilogy. I thought no one would ever be able to approach it in phantasmagoric Gothic reality, but Moorcock has come close. Gormenghast is a microcosm, Gloriana's world a marcrocosm, more Baroque than Gothic, but they have both given me fantastic images that will stay burned on my mind forever. (*Gloriana,* in a most gracious and apt gesture, is dedicated to Peake.)

(One word of warning: *Gloriana* is a pretty raunchy book. It's subtitle is "The Unfulfill'd Queen"; Gloriana's quest for a solution to her frigidity is a running subtheme of the novel; some of her solutions, as well as the proclivities of other members of her court, are not for the squeamish. ((If *that* doesn't get people to read it, nothing will.)))

On to the next knockout novel, which is Jane Gaskell's *Some Summer Lands,* the fifth book in her Atlan series. And since the first four have been reprinted over the last winter and spring, we might legitimately take a look at them, too, since they've been unavailable for some time. (We might note also that they were first published as a trilogy and that the first volume, *The Serpent,* was reprinted as two—*The Serpent* and *The Dragon*—because of length. The other two volumes are *Atlan* and *The City.)*

I remember the first time I read *The Serpent,* about ten years ago. Around fifty pages in, I suddenly had that rare and wonderful flash that I was into something really new, like nothing I had ever read before. After all these years, that still holds true.

The series revolves around one Cija (Kee-ya), the daughter of the dictatress of a small, semi-civilized country on the prehistoric continent of South America. There are other larger, more civilized countries to the north and south, not to mention Atlan, an island continent to the east which has cut itself off by a surrounding area of total vacuum.

This world abounds in strange and peculiar creatures, including a great many left-over dinosaurs; there are screens of the windows of the higher towers to keep out pterodactyls. (Don't get the idea that this is like one of those dopey film scripts that has prehistoric man coexisting with dinosaurs through a lack of paleontologic knowledge. Ms. Gaskell knows exactly what she's doing; dinosaurs can be fun.)

These books give a new meaning to the word picaresque. From

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the moment in the first book that Cija is carried off as a hostage by Zerd, the dragon general of the North (his mother was one of the blue-skinned reptile race), intended by the Dictatress to marry and murder him, her travels and adventures never stop.

She rises from scullery maid and whore to Empress, with every stop in between. She is continually being kidnapped, raped, waylaid, pursued by wolves and rival wives of Zerd's, taken advantage of, and caught in volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. She has a continuing affair with her half-brother and bears his child. (Not to mention the pregnancy by an ape with whom she lives for a while.) She is offered as a sacrifice by her father, the high priest, who is married to a crocidile.

All this would be utter nonsense in less skillful hands, but Ms. Gaskell shoots along the narrative at breakneck pace, never sacrificing humor or believibility. Cija herself is very human (despite her belief in her descent from the Gods), lovable, stubborn, none-too-bright at times, and infuriating, a true survivor. The other characters in Cija's life are also real, even the most minor. And the milieux, each more fantastic than the last, are detailed and intriguing. Only a very few times do the books bog down, amazingly enough for their combined length. Usually I found myself giggling every few pages at the next surprise Gaskell pulls out of a hat for us. There are also moments of great beauty, such as the piper to the dancing beasts of Atlan, straight from the gates of dawn, and moments of horror that rattled even unshakable old me; a banquet/orgy with a roast dinosaur as *pièce de résistance* was one such, and Cija and her ape lover having to take refuge in the corpse of a tyrannosaurus (*in* it) was another.

There was a long hiatus between the writing of the first books and *Some Summer Lands* during which Ms. Gaskell pursued a career as a journalist. The major immediate difference is that this one is told by Cija's daughter by Zerd, mute but infinitely precocious. And it is another round of inventive, beautiful and horrifying adventures for Cija. But Gaskell has made an amazing leap; where before I giggled at her endless invention, here I gasp. This one *is* literally indescribable.

A final thought on the Atlan books. They might well be viewed as the *underside* of heroic fantasy; they call attention to the fact that while the heroes and generals are off battling armies and slaying dragons, the women, children, and poor folk are being raped and pillaged by those armies and eaten by those dragons.

And an afterthought on both *Gloriana* and *Some Summer*

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Lands—both these books have several things in common: writing so brilliant as to forever give the lie to SF/fantasy as a badly written genre, and a kind of playful, decadent, *civilized* elegance. If this be the wave of the future for the genre, I'm all for it.

C. J. Cherryh has proved an interesting author since her quite recent debut, and a prolific one; she seems, in fact, to be in some sort of race with Tanith Lee as to who can turn out more books per year. Cherryh's first novel, *Gate of Ivrel,* was a Bradleyesque story with a heroic fantasy surface and a solidly science-fictional base. And her second, *Brothers of Earth,* showed an impressive ability to create a culture and people it with logical products of that culture.

Her latest is *The Faded Sun: Shon' Jir,* which is a sequel, logically enough, to *The Faded Sun: Kesrith.* Less a sequel, as a matter of fact, than a continuation; it does not really stand on its own.

Kesrith concerned a planet, Kesrith, on which three races, none of them native to it, were reaching a curious nexus. Humanity and the regul had long been at war; the regul were an expansionist race, concerned with trade, intelligent but totally unwarlike. They had hired the mri to fight for them, a nomadic race whose home world was unknown. The culture of the mercenery mri is reminiscent of the Islamic peoples, with a strong code of honor; the fighting caste of both sexes goes veiled.

Kesrith closes after the human–regul war has ended; it has taken a tremendous toll of the mri, of which only two are left on Kesrith. As the tiny remnant of their people land, they and their ship are destroyed by the regul as a sort of peace offering to the occupying humans. The two remaining mri form an uneasy alliance with a human, Sten Duncan, to find a shrine of their people in which is an ancient sacred artifact.

In *Shon' Jir,* that artifact turns out to be a guide to the long-lost home world of the mri; the two remaining and Duncan are given a ship by the human authorities to attempt to find it. They are followed by both human and regul, the latter terrified that more mri might still live. The ending is a three-cornered fracas that ends so inconclusively that I have no idea whether there will be a third *Faded Sun* book or not.

I'm afraid I got a little impatient around the middle of *Shon' Jir.* The story just didn't seem to be sustaining the length to which it had been drawn. The central section of the book is a

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sort of endless intercultural squabble between Duncan and the two mri; I got to disliking them all a good deal and thinking "a plague on both your houses." (Duncan finally decides to become a warrior mri, a sort of *Lawrence of Kesrith;* they deserve each other.) Besides, the whole thing is written in a sort of stilted, formal prose that is fine for the mri dialogue, but not for the entire narrative. There were times when I felt as if I were reading the Koran.

The picturing of Barsoom has been an up-and-down matter since Edgar Rice Burroughs created it so many years ago. Certainly setting a high standard was J. Allen St. John, Burroughs' first and foremost illustrator during his lifetime. Roy Krenkel, Jr., caught something of St. John's sketchy art-nouveau style in his covers for the early Ace editions, though they were not so vivid as they might be. Frazetta did some acceptable dust jackets for book club editions, and Boris Vallejo had a wonderful interpretation of John and Dejah on John Flint Roy's *Guide to Barsoom.* An unnamed artist did splendid covers for some British paperbacks in the '60s.

But later editions of the Mars books have had some pretty uninspired artwork. Now, praise be, there is a new release of the first six, with covers that might just top them all. They are by Michael Whelan, who did the recent "Dragonriders of Pern" series covers, and they are magnificent. Whelan, besides being a fine draftsman, uses an unusually bright palette. Boy, are the red men red, and the green men green! The latter are startingly thin, looking rather like costumed mantises, but they work; the cities are wonderfully exotic concoctions; and John, Dejah, and Thuvia are as beautiful as they should be. The rest of the series will be republished soon with Whelan covers.

As long as we're talking about Barsoom, we may as well note what's inside those covers. I can just hear all the old Barsoom hands out there incredulously saying "Review Burroughs at this late date!" to which I answer, "You'd be amazed at the number of young SF readers who ask me if he's worth reading." The answer is yes, yes, and yes, with a few qualifications.

So far as I'm concerned, Burroughs is the grandfather of American science fiction, and the first major practitioner of science fiction for the fun of it, i.e. SF not used as a vehicle for moral or philosophical ideas *a la* Wells. And it is indeed fun. Don't expect great writing, and the long arm of coincidence plays a heavy role

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in his plots—if there's a hero, a heroine, a villain, and a *banth* (a sort of six-legged lion) in an area of a thousand square miles, they're all going to end up at the same place at the same time.

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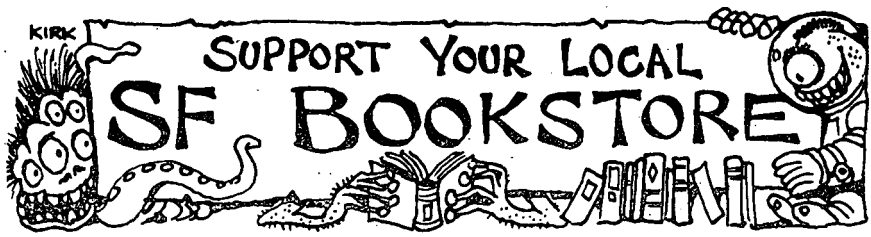

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THE THAW
by Tanith Lee
art: Pat Ortega

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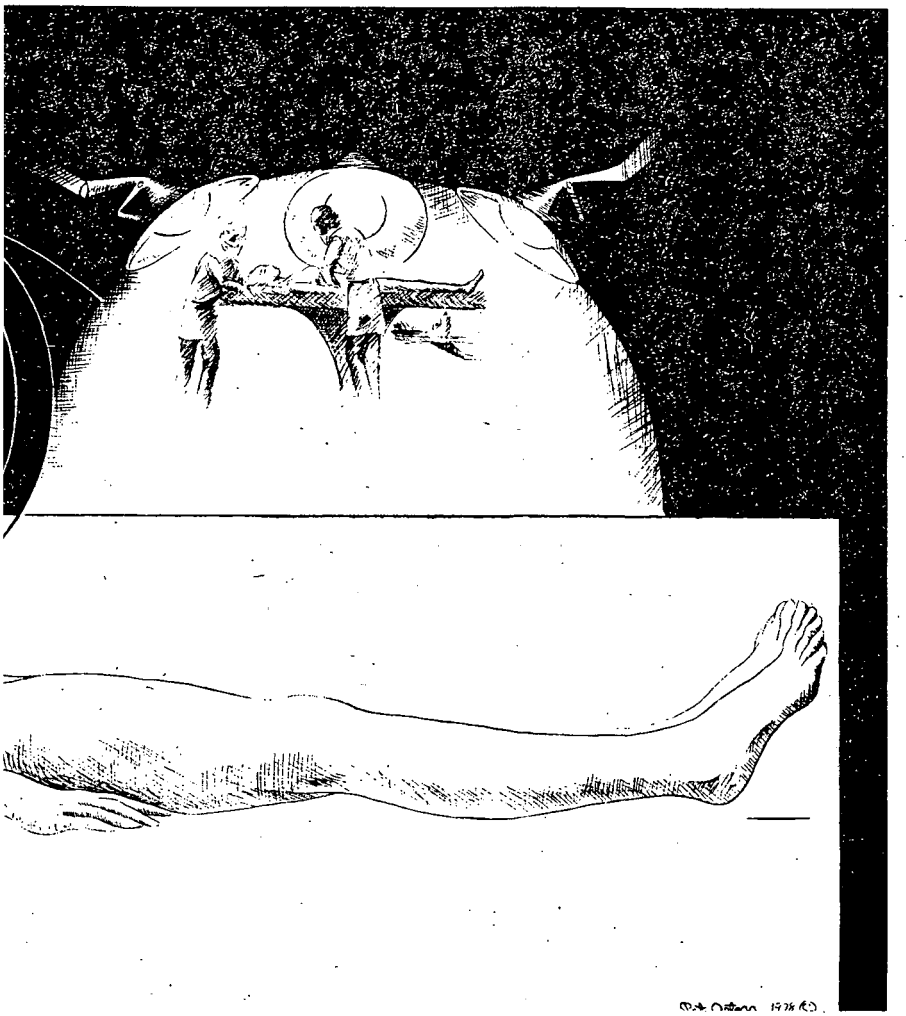

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Tanith Lee reports that she was born in 1947, worked at various jobs, such as in a library and a restaurant, and became a full-time writer in 1976. She's seen some fourteen books published so far, with more to come; her principal SF publisher is DAW Books. Two of her radio plays, one about Odysseus and one about a vampire, have been performed by the B.B.C. in London during 1977; and she is at work on another which the B.B.C. commissioned.

Ladies first, they said.

That was O.K. Then they put a histotrace on the lady in question, and called me.

"No thanks," I said.

"Listen," they said, "you're a generative blood-line descendant of Carla Brice. Aren't you interested, for God's sake? This is a unique moment, a unique experience. She's going to need support, understanding. A contact. Come on. Don't be frigid about it."

"I guess Carla is more frigid than I'm ever likely to be."

They laughed, to keep up the informalities. Then they mentioned the Institute grant I'd receive, just for hanging around and being supportive. To a quasi-unemployed artist, that was temptation and a half. They also reminded me that on this initial bout there wouldn't be much publicity, so later, if I wanted to capitalize as an eyewitness, and providing good old Carla was willing—I had a sudden vision of getting very rich, very quick, and with the minimum of effort, and I succumbed ungracefully.

Which accurately demonstrates my three strongest qualities: laziness, optimism, and blind stupidity. Which in turn sums up the whole story, more or less. And that's probably why I was told to write it down for the archives of the human race. I can't think of a better way to depress and wreck the hopes of frenzied, shackled, bleating humanity.

But to return to Carla. She was, I believe, my great-great-great-great-great grandmother. Give or take a great. Absolute accuracy isn't one of my talents, either. The relevant part is, however, that at thirty-three, Carla had developed the rare heart complaint valu—val—well, she'd developed it. She had a few months, or less, and so she opted, along with seventy other people

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that year, to undergo Cryogenic Suspension till a cure could be found. Cry Sus had been getting progressively more popular, ever since the 1980s. Remember? It's the freezing method of holding a body in refrigerated stasis, indefinitely preserving thereby flesh, bones, organs and the rest, perfect and pristine, in a frosty crystal box. (Just stick a tray of water in the freezer and see for yourself.) It may not strike you as cozy any more, but that's hardly surprising. In 1993, seventy-one persons, of whom four-or-five-or-six-great granny Carla was one, saw it as the only feasible alternative to death. In the following two hundred years, four thousand others copied their example. They froze their malignancies, their unreliable hearts, and their corroding tissues, and as the light faded from their snowed-over eyes, they must have dreamed of waking up in the fabulous future.

Funny thing about the future. Each next second is the future. And now it's the present. And now it's the past.

Those all-together four thousand and ninety-one who deposited their physiognomies in the cold-storage compartments of the world were looking forward to the future. And here it was. And we were it.

And smack in the middle of this future, which I naively called Now, was I, Tacey Brice, a rotten little unskilled artist, painting gimcrack flying saucers for the spacines. There was a big flying saucer sighting boom that year of 2193. Either you recollect that, or you don't. Nearly as big as the historic boom between the 1930s and '90s. Psychologists had told us it was our human inadequacy, searching all over for a father-mother figure to replace God. Besides, we were getting desperate. We'd penetrated our solar system to a limited extent, but without meeting anybody on the way.

That's another weird thing. When you read the speculativia of the 1900s, you can see just how much they expected of us. It was going to be all or nothing. Either the world would become a miracle of rare device with plastisteel igloos balanced on the stratosphere and metal giblets, or we'd have gone out in a blast of radiation. Neither of which had happened. We'd had problems, of course. Over two hundred years, problems occur. There had been the Fission Tragedy, and the World Flood of '14. There'd been the huge pollution clear-ups complete with the rationing that entailed, and one pretty nasty pandemic. They had set us back, that's obvious. But not halted us. So we reached 2193 mostly unscathed, with a whizz-bang technology not quite as whizz, or

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bang, as prophesied. A place where doors opened when they saw who you were, and with a colony on Mars, but where they hadn't solved the unemployment problem or the geriatric problem. Up in the ether there were about six hundred buzz-whuzzes headed out into nowhere, bleeping information about earth. But we hadn't landed on Alpha Centauri yet. And if the waste-disposal jammed, brother, it jammed. What I'm trying to say (superfluously, because you're ahead of me), is that their future, those four thousand and ninety-one, their future which was our present, wasn't as spectacular as they'd trusted or feared. Excepting the Salenic Vena-derivative drugs, which had rendered most of the diseases of the 1900s and the 2000s obsolete.

And suddenly, one day, someone had a notion.

"Hey, guys," this someone suggested, "you recall all those sealed frosty boxes the medic centers have? You know, with the on-ice carcinomas and valu-diddums in 'em? Well, don't you think it'd be grand to defrost the lot of them and pump 'em full of health?"

"Crazy," said everybody else, and wet themselves with enthusiasm.

After that, they got the thing organised on a global scale. And first off, not wanting to chance any public mishaps, they intended to unfreeze a single frost box, in relative privacy. Perhaps they put all the names in a hat. Whatever, they picked Carla Brice, or Brr-Ice, if you liked that Newsies' tablotape pun.

And since Carla Brr-Ice might feel a touch extra chilly, coming back to life two hundred years after she's cryonised out of it, they dredged up a blood-line descendant to hold her cold old thirty-three-year hand. And that was Tacey Brr-Ice. Me.

The room below was pink, but the cold pink of strawberry ice cream. There were forty doctors of every gender prowling about in it and round the crystal slab. It put me in mind of a pack of wolves with a carcass they couldn't quite decide when to eat. But then, I was having a nervous attack, up on the spectator gallery where they'd sat me. The countdown had begun two days ago, and I'd been ushered in at noon today. For an hour now, the crystal had been clear. I could see a sort of blob in it, which gradually resolved into a naked woman. Straight off, even with her lying there stiff as a board and utterly defenseless, I could tell she was the sort of lady who scared me dizzy. She was large and well-shaped, with a mane of dark red hair. She was the type that goes

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outdoor swimming at all seasons, skis, shoots rapids in a canoe, becomes the co-ordinator of a moon colony. The type that bites. Valu-diddums had got her, but nothing else could have done. Not child, beast, nor man. Certainly not another woman. Oh my. And this was my multiple-great granny that I was about to offer the hand of reassurance.

Another hour, and some dial and click mechanisms down in the strawberry ice room started to dicker. The wolves flew in for the kill. A dead lioness, that was Carla. Then the box rattled and there was a yell. I couldn't see for scrabbling medics.

"What happened?"

The young medic detailed to sit on the spec gallery with me sighed.

"I'd say she's opened her eyes."

The young medic was black as space and beautiful as the stars therein. But he didn't give a damn about me. You could see he was in love with Carla the lioness. I was simply a pain he had to put up with for two or three hours, while he stared at the goddess beneath.

But now the medics had drawn off. I thought of the Sleeping Beauty story, and Snow White. Her eyes were open indeed. Coppery brown to tone with the mane. She didn't appear dazed. She appeared contemptuous. Precisely as I'd anticipated. Then the crystal box lid began to rise.

"Jesus," I said.

"Strange you should say that," said the black medic. His own wonderful eyes fixed on Carla, he'd waxed profound and enigmatic. "The manner in which we all still use these outdated religious expletives: *God, Christ, Hell,* long after we've ceased to credit their religious basis as such. The successful completion of this experiment in life-suspense and restoration has a bearing on the same matter," he murmured, his inch-long lashes brushing the plastase pane. "You've read of the controversy regarding this process? It was seen at one era as an infringement of religious faith."

"Oh, yes?"

I kept on staring at him. Infinitely preferable to Carla, with her open eyes, and the solitary bending medic with the supadermic.

"The idea of the soul," said the medic on the gallery. "The immortal part which survives death. But what befalls a soul trapped for years, centuries, in a living yet statically frozen body? In a physical limbo, a living death. You see the problem this would pose for the religious?"

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"I—uh—"

"But, of course, today . . . " he spread his hands. "There is no such barrier to lucid thought. The life force, we now know, resides purely in the brain, and thereafter in the motor nerves, the spinal cord, and attendant reflexive centres. There is no *soul*."

Then he shut up and nearly swooned away, and I realized Carla had met his eye.

I looked, and she was sitting, part reclined against some medic's arm. The medic was telling her where she was and what year it was and how, by this evening, the valu-diddums would be no more than a bad dream, and then she could go out into the amazing new world with her loving descendant, who she could observe up there on the gallery.

She did spare a glance for me. It lasted about .09 of a mini-instant. I tried to unglue my mouth and flash her a warming welcoming grin, but before I could manage it, she was back to studying the black medic.

At that moment somebody came and whipped me away for celebratory alcohol, and two hours later, when I'd celebrated rather too much, they took me up a plushy corridor to meet Carla, skin to skin.

Actually, she was dressed on this occasion. She'd had a shower and a couple of post-defrosting tests and some shots and the anti-valu-diddums stuff. Her hair was smouldering like a fire in a forest. She wore the shiny smock medical centers insisted that you wore, but on her it was like a design original. She'd even had a tan frozen in with her, or maybe it was my dazzled eyes that made her seem all bronzed and glowing. Nobody could look that good, that *healthy,* after two hundred years on ice. And if they did, they shouldn't. Her room was crammed with flowers and bottles of scent and exotic light paintings, courtesy of the Institute. And then they trundled me in.

Not astoundingly, she gazed at me with bored amusement. Like she'd come to the dregs at the bottom of the wine.

"This is Tacey," somebody said, making free with my forename.

Carla spoke, in a voice of maroon velvet.

"Hallo, er, Tacey." Patently, my cognomen was a big mistake. Never mind, she'd overlook it for now. "I gather we are related."

I was drunk, but it wasn't helping.

"I'm your gr—yes, we are, but—" I intelligently blurted. The "but" was going to be a prologue to some nauseating, placatory, crawler's drivel about her gorgeousness and youth. It wasn't

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necessary, not even to let her know how scared I was. She could tell that easily, plus how I'd shrunk to a shadow in her high-voltage glare. Before I could complete my hiccupping sycophancy, anyway, the medic in charge said: "Tacey is your link, Mz Brice, with civilisation as it currently is."

Carla couldn't resist it. She raised one manicured eyebrow, frozen exquisite for two centuries. If Tacey was the link, civilisation could take a walk.

"My apartment," I went on blurting, "it's medium, but—"

What was I going to say now? About how all my grant from the Institute I would willingly spend on gowns and perfumes and skis and automatic rifles, or whatever Carla wanted. How I'd move out and she could have the apartment to herself. (She wouldn't like the spacine murals on the walls).

"It's just a bri— a bridge," I managed. "Till you get acclimatosed—atised."

She watched me as I made a fool of myself, or rather, displayed my true foolishness. Finally I comprehended the message in her copper eyes: Don't bother. That was all: Don't bother. You're a failure, Carla's copper irises informed me, as if I didn't know. Don't make excuses. You can alter nothing. I expect nothing from you. I will stay while I must in your ineffectual vicinity, and you may fly round me and scorch your wings if you like. When I am ready, I shall leave immediately, searing over your sky like a meteor. You can offer no aid, no interest, no grain I cannot garner for myself.

"How kind of Tacey," Carla's voice said. "Come, darling, and let me kiss you."

Somehow, I'd imagined her still as very cold from the frosty box, but she was blood heat. Ashamed, I let her brush my cheek with her meteoric lips. Perhaps I'd burn.

"I'd say this calls for a toast," said the medic in charge. "But just rose-juice for Mz Brice, I'm afraid, at present."

Carla smiled at him, and I hallucinated a rose-bush, thorns too, eviscerated by her teeth. Lions drink blood, not roses.

I got home paralysed and floundered about trying to change things. In the middle of attempting to re-spray-paint over a wall, I sank on a pillow and slept. Next day I was angry, the way you can only be angry over something against which you are powerless. So damn it. Let her arrive and see space-shuttles, mother-ships, and whirly bug-eyed monsters all across the plastase. And don't pull the ready-cook out of the alcove to clean the feed-pipes

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behind it that I hadn't seen for three years. Or dig the plant out of the cooled-water dispenser. Or buy any new garments, blinds, rugs, sheets. And don't conceal the Wage-Increment cheques when they skitter down the chute. Or prop up the better spacines I'd illustrated, on the table where she won't miss them.

I visited her one more time during the month she stayed at the Institute. I didn't have the courage not to take her anything, although I knew that whatever I offered would be wrong. Actually, I had an impulse to blow my first grant cheque and my W-I together and buy her a little antique stiletto of Toledo steel. It was blatantly meant to commit murder with, and as I handed it to her I'd bow and say, "For you, Carla. I just know you can find a use for it." But naturally I didn't have the bravura. I bought her a flagon of expensive scent she didn't need and was rewarded by seeing her put it on a shelf with three other identically packaged flagons, each twice the size of mine. She was wearing a reclinerobe of amber silk, and I almost reached for sunglasses. We didn't say much. I tottered from her room, sunburned and peeling. And that night I painted another flying saucer on the wall.

The day she left the Institute, they sent a mobile for me. I was supposed to collect and ride to the apartment with Carla, to make her feel homey. I felt sick.

Before I met her, though, the medic in charge wafted me into his office.

"We're lucky," he said. "Mz Brice is a most independent lady. Her readjustment has been, in fact, remarkable. None of the traumas or rebuttals we've been anxious about. I doubt if most of the other subjects to be revived from Cryogenesis will demonstrate the equivalent rate of success."

"They're really reviving them, then?" I inquired lamely. I was glad to be in here, putting off my fourth congress with inadequacy.

"A month from today. Dependant on the ultimately positive results of our post-resuscitation analysis of Mz Brice. But, as I intimated, I hardly predict any hitch there."

"And how long," I swallowed, "how long do you think Carla will want to stay with me?"

"Well, she seems to have formed quite an attachment for you, Tacey. It's a great compliment, you know, from a woman like that. A proud, volatile spirit. But she needs an anchor for a while. We all need our anchors. Probably, her proximity will benefit you, in return. Don't you agree?"

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I didn't answer, and he concluded I was overwhelmed. He started to describe to me that glorious scheduled event, the global link-up, when every single cryogone was to be revived, as simultaneously with each other as they could arrange it. The process would be going out on five channels of the Spatials, visible to us all. Technology triumphant yet again, bringing us a minute or two of transcendental catharsis. I thought about the beautiful black medic and his words on religion. And this is how we replaced it, presumably (when we weren't saucer-sighting), shedding tears sentimentally over four thousand and ninety idiots fumbling out of the deep-freeze.

"One last, small warning," the medic in charge added. "You may notice—or you may not, I can't be positive—the occasional lapse in the behavioural patterns of Mz Brice."

There was a fantasy for me. Carla, *lapsed.*

"In what way?" I asked, miserably enjoying the unlikelihood.

"Mere items. A mood, an aberration—a brief disorientation even. These are to expected in a woman reclaimed by life after two hundred years, and in a world she is no longer familiar with. As I explained, I looked for much worse and far greater quantity. The odd personality slip is inevitable. You musn't be alarmed. At such moments the most steadying influence on Mz Brice will be a non-Institutional normalcy of surroundings. And the presence of yourself."

I nearly laughed.

I would have, if the door hadn't opened, and if Carla, in mock red-lynx fur, hadn't stalked into the room.

I didn't even try to create chatter. Alone in the mobile, with the auto driving us along the cool concrete highways, there wasn't any requirement to pretend for the benefit of others. Carla reckoned I was a schmoil, and I duly schmoiled. Mind you, now and again, she put out a silk paw and gave me a playful tap. Like when she asked me where I got my hair *done.* But I just told her about the ready-set parlours and she quit. Then again, she asked a couple of less abstract questions. Did libraries still exist, that was one. The second one was if I slept well.

I went along with everything in a dank stupor. I think I was half kidding myself it was going to be over soon. Then the mobile drove into the auto-lift of my apartment block, the gates gaped and we got out. As my door recognized me and split wide, it abruptly hit me that Carla and I were going to be hand in glove for

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some while. A month at least, while the Institute computed its final tests. Maybe more, if Carla had my lazy streak somewhere in her bronze and permasteel frame.

She strode into my apartment and stood flaming among the flying saucers and the wine-ringed furniture. The fake-fur looked as if she'd shot it herself. She was a head taller than I was ever going to be. And then she startled me, about the only way she could right then.

"I'm tired, Tacey," said Carla.

No wise-cracks, no vitriol, no stare from Olympus.

She glided to the bedroom. O.K. I'd allocated the bed as hers, the couch as mine. She paused, gold digit on the panel that I'd pre-set to respond to her finger.

"Will you forgive me?" she wondered aloud.

Her voice was soporific. I yawned.

"Sure, Carla."

She stayed behind the closed panels for hours. The day reddened over the city, colours as usual heightened by the weather control that operates a quarter of a mile up. I slumped here and there, unable to eat or rest or read or doodle. I was finding out what it was going to be like, having an apartment and knowing it wasn't mine any more. Even through a door, Carla dominated.

Around 19, I knocked. No reply.

Intimidated, I slunk off. I wouldn't play the septophones, even with the ear-pieces only, even with the volume way down. Might wake Granny. You see, if you could wake her from two hundred years in the freezer, you could certainly wake her after eight hours on a dormadais.

At twenty-four midnight, she still hadn't come out.

Coward, I knocked again, and feebly called: "Night, Carla. See you tomorrow."

On the couch I had nightmares, or nightcarlas to be explicit. Some were very realistic, like the one where the trust bonds Carla's estate had left for her hadn't accumulated after all and she was destitute, and going to remain with me for ever and ever. Or there were the comic-strip ones where the fake red-lynx got under the cover and bit me. Or the surreal ones where Carla came floating towards me, clad only in her smouldering hair, and everything caught fire from it, and I kept saying, "Please, Carla, don't set the rug alight. Please, Carla, don't set the couch alight." In the end there was merely a dream where Carla bent over me, hissing something like an anaconda—if they do hiss. She wanted

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me to stay asleep, apparently, and for some reason I was fighting her, though I was almost comatose. The strange thing in this dream was that Carla's eyes had altered from copper to a brilliant topaz yellow, like the lynx's.

It must have been about four in the morning that I woke up. I think it was the washer unit that woke me. Or it could have been the septophones. Or the waste-disposal. Or the drier. Or any of the several gadgets a modern apartment was equipped with. Because they were all on. It sounded like a madhouse. Looked like one. All the lights were on, too. In the middle of chaos: Carla. She was quite naked, the way I'd seen her at the first, but she had the sort of nakedness that seems like clothes, clean-cut, firm and flawless. The sort that makes me want to hide inside a stone. She was reminiscent of a sorceress in the midst of her sorcery, the erupting mechanisms sprawling round her in the fierce light. I had a silly thought: *Carla's going nova.* Then she turned and saw me. My mouth felt as if it had been security-sealed, but I got out, "You O.K., Carla?"

"I am, darling. Go back to sleep now."

That's the last thing I remember till 10 A.M. the next day.

I wondered initially if Carla and the gadgets had been an additional dream. But when I checked the energy-meter I discovered they hadn't. I was plodding to the ready-cook when Carla emerged from the bedroom in her amber reclinerobe.

She didn't say a word. She just relaxed at the counter and let me be her slave. I got ready to prepare her the large breakfast she outlined. Then I ran her bath. When the water-meter shut off half through, Carla suggested I put in the extra tags to ensure the tub was filled right up.

As she bathed, I sat at the counter and had another nervous attack.

Of course, Carla was predictably curious. Back in 1993, many of our gadgets hadn't been invented, or at least not developed to their present standard. Why not get up in the night and turn everything on? Why did it have to seem sinister? Maybe my sleeping through it practically non-stop was the thing that troubled me. All right. So Carla was a hypnotist. Come to consider, should I run a histotrace myself, in an attempt to learn what Carla was—had been?

But let's face it, what really upset me was the low on the energy-meter, the water-meter taking a third of my week's water tags in one morning. And Carla luxuriously wallowing, leaving

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me to foot the bill.

Could I say anything? No. I knew she'd immobilise me before I'd begun.

When she came from the bathroom, I asked her did she want to go out. She said no, but I could visit the library, if I would, and pick up this book and tape list she'd called through to them. I checked the call-meter. That was down, too.

"I intend to act the hermit for a while, Tacey," Carla murmured behind me as I guiltily flinched away from the meter. "I don't want to get involved in a furor of publicity. I gather the news of my successful revival will have been leaked today. The tablotapes will be sporting it. But I understand, by the news publishing codes of the '80s, that unless I approach the Newsies voluntarily, they are not permitted to approach me."

"Yes, that's right." I gazed pleadingly into the air. "I guess you wouldn't ever reconsider that, Carla? It could mean a lot of money. That is, not for you to contact the Newsies. But if you'd all—allow me to on your beh—half."

She chuckled like a lioness with her throat full of gazelle. The hair rose on my neck as she slunk closer. When her big, warm, elegant hand curved over my skull, I shuddered.

"No, Tacey. I don't think I'd care for that. I don't need the cash. My estate investments, I hear, are flourishing."

"I was thinking of m— I was thinking of me, Carla. I cou—could use the tags."

The hand slid from my head and batted me lightly. Somehow, I was glad I hadn't given her the Toledo knife after all.

"No, I don't think so. I think it will do you much more good to continue as you are. Now, run along to the library, darling."

I went mainly because I was glad to get away from her. To utter the spineless whining I had had drained entirely my thin reserves of courage. I was shaking when I reached the auto-lift. I had a wild plan of leaving town, and leaving my apartment with Carla in it, and going to ground. It was more than just inadequacy now. Hunter and hunted. And as I crept through the long grass, her fiery breath was on my heels.

I collected the twenty books and the fifty tapes and paid for the loan. I took them back to the apartment and laid them before my astonishing amber granny. I was too scared even to hide. Much too scared to disobey.

I sat on the sun-patio, though it was the weather control day for rain. Through the plastase panels I heard the tapes educating

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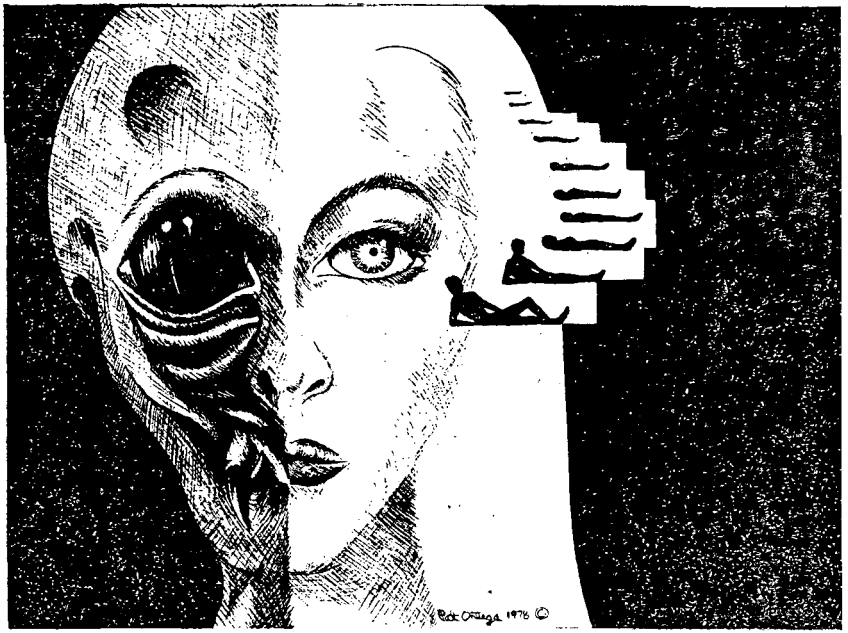

Carla on every aspect of contemporary life; social, political, economic, geographical, and carnal.

When she summoned me, I fixed lunch. Later, drinks and supper.

Then I was too nervous to go to sleep. I passed out in the bathroom, sitting in the shower cubicle. Had nightcarlas. Carla eating salad. Didn't wake up till 10 A.M. Checked. All meters down again.

When I trod on smashed plastase I thought it was sugar. Then I saw the cooled-water dispenser was in ninety-five bits. Where the plant had been, there was only soil and condensation and trailing roots.

I looked, and everywhere beheld torn-off leaves and tiny clots of earth. There was a leaf by Carla's bedroom. I knocked and my heart knocked to keep my hand company.

But Carla wasn't interested in breakfast, wasn't hungry.

I knew why not. She'd eaten my plant.

You can take a bet I meant to call up the Institute right away. Somehow, I didn't. For one thing, I didn't want to call from the

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apartment and risk Carla catching me at it. For another, I didn't want to go out and leave her, in case she did something worse. Then again, I was terrified to linger in her vicinity. A *lapse,* the medic in charge had postulated. It was certainly that. Had she done anything like it at the Institute? Somehow I had the idea she hadn't. She'd saved it for me. Out of playful malice.

I dithered for an hour, till I panicked, pressed the call button and spoke the digits. I never heard the door open. She seemed to know exactly when to—*strike*; yes that *is* the word I want. I sensed her there. She didn't even touch me. I let go the call button.

"Who were you calling?" Carla asked.

"Just a guy I used to pair with," I said, but it came out husky and gulped and quivering.

"Well, go ahead. Don't mind me."

Her maroon voice, bored and amused and indifferent to anything I might do, held me like a steel claw. And I discovered I had to turn around and face her. I had to stare into her eyes.

The scorn in them was killing. I wanted to shrivel and roll under the rug, but I couldn't look away.

"But if you're not going to call anyone, run my bath, darling," Carla said.

I ran her bath.

It was that easy. Of course.

She was magnetic. Irresistible.

I couldn't—

I could *not*—

Partly, it had all become incredible. I couldn't picture myself accusing Carla of house-plant-eating to the medics at the Institute. Who'd believe it? It was nuts. I mean, too nuts even for them. And presently, I left off quite believing it myself.

Nevertheless, somewhere in my brain I kept on replaying those sentences of the medic in charge: *the occasional lapse in the behavioural patterns . . . a mood, an aberration . . .* And against that, point counter-point, there kept on playing that phrase the beautiful black medic had reeled off enigmatically as a cultural jest: *But what befalls a soul trapped for years, centuries, in a living yet statically frozen body?*

Meanwhile, by sheer will, by the force of her persona, she'd stopped me calling. And that same thing stopped me talking about her to anybody on the street, sent me tongue-tied to fetch

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groceries, sent me grovelling to conjure meals. It was almost as if it also shoved me asleep when she wanted and brought me awake ditto.

Doesn't time fly when you're having fun?

Twenty days, each more or less resembling each, hurried by. Carla didn't do anything else particularly weird, at least not that I saw or detected. But then, I never woke up nights any more. And I had an insane theory that the meters had been fiddled, because they weren't low, but they felt as if they should be. I hadn't got any more plants. I missed some packaged paper lingerie, but it turned up under Carla's bed, where I'd kicked it when the bed was mine. Twenty days, twenty-five. The month of Carla's post-resuscitation tests was nearly through. One morning, I was stumbling about like a zombie, cleaning the apartment because the dustease had jammed and Carla had spent five minutes in silent comment on the dust. I was moving in that combined sludge of terror, mindlessness and masochistic cringing she'd taught me, when the door signal went.

When I opened the door, there stood the black medic with a slim case of file-tapes. I felt transparent, and that was how he treated me. He gazed straight through me to the empty room where he had hoped my granny would be.

"I'm afraid your call doesn't seem to be working," he said. (Why had I the notion Carla had done something to the call?) "I'd be grateful to see Mz Brice, if she can spare me a few minutes. Just something we'd like to check for the files."

That instant, splendid on her cue, Carla manifested from the bathroom. The medic had seen her naked in the frosty box, but not a naked that was vaguely and fluently sheathed in a damp towel. It had the predictable effect. As he paused transfixed, Carla bestowed her most gracious smile.

"Sit down," she said. "What check is this? Tacey, darling, why not arrange some fresh coffee?"

Tacey darling went to the coffee cone. Over its bubbling, I heard him say to her, "It's simply that Doctor Something was a little worried by a possible amnesia. Certainly, none of the memory areas seem physically impaired. But you see, here and there on the tape—"

"Give me an example, please," drawled Carla.

The black medic lowered his lashes as if to sweep the tablotape.

"Some confusion over places, and names. Your second husband, Francis, for instance, who you named as Frederick. And there, the

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red mark—Doctor Something-Else mentioned the satellite disaster of '91, and it seems you did not recall—"

"You're referring to the malfunction of the Ixion 11, which broke up and crashed in the midwest, taking three hundred lives," said Carla. She sounded like a purring text-book. She leaned forward, and I could watch him tremble all the way across from the coffee cone. "Doctor Something and Doctor Something-Else," said Carla, "will have to make allowances for my excitement at rebirth. Now, I can't have you driving out this way for nothing. How about you come to dinner, the night before the great day. Tacey doesn't see nearly enough people her own age. As for me, let's say you'll make a two-hundred-year old lady very happy."

The air between them was electric enough to form sparks. By the "Great day" she meant, patently, the five-channel Spatial event when her four thousand and ninety confrères got liberated from the sub-zero. But he plainly didn't care so much about defrostings any more.

The coffee cone boiled over. I noticed with a shock I was crying. Nobody else did.

What I wanted to do was program the ready-cook for the meal, get in some wine, and get the hell out of the apartment and leave the two of them alone. I'd pass the night at one of the all-night Populars, and creep in around 10 A.M. the next morning. That's the state I frankly acknowledged she had reduced me to. I'd have been honestly grateful to have done that. But Carla wouldn't let me.

"Out?" she inquired. "But this whole party is for you, darling."

There was nobody about. She didn't have to pretend. She and I knew I was the slave. She and I knew her long-refrigerated soul, returning in fire, had scalded me into a melty on the ground. So it could only be cruelty, this. She seemed to be experimenting, even, as she had with the gadgets. The psychological dissection of an inferior inhabitant of the future.

What I had to do therefore, was to visit the ready-set hair parlour, and buy a dress with my bi-monthly second W-I cheque. Carla, though naturally she didn't go with me, somehow instigated and oversaw these ventures. Choosing the dress, she was oddly at my elbow. *That* one, her detached and and omnipresent aura instructed me. It was expensive, and it was scarlet and gold. It would have looked wonderful on somebody else. But not me.

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That dress just sucked the little life I've got right out of me.

Come the big night (before the big day, for which the countdown must already have, in fact, begun), there I was, done up like a New Year parcel, and with my own problematical soul wizened within me. The door signal went, and the slave accordingly opened the door, and the dark angel entered, politely thanking me as he nearly walked straight through me.

He looked so marvellous, I practically bolted. But still the aura of Carla, and Carla's wishes, which were beginning to seem to be communicating themselves telepathically, held me put.

Then Carla appeared. I hadn't seen her before, that evening. The dress was lionskin, and it looked real, despite the anti-game-hunting laws. Her hair was a smooth auburn waterfall that left bare an ear with a gold star dependant from it. I just went into the cooking area and uncorked a bottle and drank most of it straight off.

They both had good appetites, though hers was better than his. She'd eaten a vast amount since she'd been with me, presumably ravenous after that long fast. I was the waitress, so I waited on them. When I reached my plate, the food had congealed because the warmer in the table on my side was faulty. Anyway, I wasn't hungry. There were two types of wine. I drank the cheap type. I was on the second bottle now, and sufficiently sad I could have howled, but I'd also grown uninvolved, viewing my sadness from a great height.

They danced together to the septophones. I drank some more wine. I was going to be very, very ill tomorrow. But that was tomorrow. Verily. When I looked up, they'd danced themselves into the bedroom and the panels were shut. Carla's cruelty had had its run and I wasn't prepared for any additions, such as ecstatic moans from the interior, to augment my frustration. Accordingly, garbed in my New Year parcel frock, hair in curlicues, and another bottle in my hand, I staggered forth into the night.

I might have met a thug, a rapist, a murderer, or even one of the numerous polipatrols that roam the city to prevent the activities of such. But I didn't meet anyone who took note of me. Nobody cared. Nobody was interested. Nobody wanted to be my friend, rob me, abuse me, give me a job or a goal, or make me happy, or make love to me. So if you thought I was a Judas, just you remember that. If one of you slobs had taken any notice of me that night—

I didn't have to wait for morning to be ill. There was a hand-

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some washroom on Avenue East. I'll never forget it. I was there quite a while.

When the glamourous weather-control dawn irradiated the city, I was past the worst. And by 10 A.M. I was trudging home, queasy, embittered, hard-done-by, but sober. I was even able to register the tabloes everywhere and the holoid neons, telling us all that the great day was here. The day of the four thousand and ninety. Thawday. I wondered dimly if Carla and the Prince of Darkness were still celebrating it in my bed. She should have been cold. Joke. All right. It isn't.

The door to my apartment let me in. The place was as I'd abandoned it. The window-blinds were down, the table strewn with plates and glasses. The bedroom door firmly shut.

I pressed the switch to raise the blinds, and nothing happened, which didn't surprise me. That in itself should have proved to me how far the influence had gone and how there was no retreat. But I only had this random desultory urge to see what the apartment door would do now. What it did was not react. Not even when I put my hand on the panel, which method was generally reserved for guests. It had admitted me, but wouldn't let me out again. Carla had done something to it. As she had to the call, the meters, and to me. But how—personal power? Ridiculous. I was a spineless dope, that was why she'd been able to negate me. Yet—forty-one medics, with a bevy of tests and questions, some of which, apparently, she hadn't got right, ate from her hand. And maybe her psychic ability had increased. Practice makes perfect.

. . . What befalls a soul trapped for years, centuries, in a living yet statically frozen body?

It was dark in the room, with the blinds irreversibly staying down and the lights irreversibly staying off.

Then the bedroom door slid wide, and Carla slid out. Naked again, and glowing in the dark. She smiled at me, pityingly.

"Tacey, darling, now you've gotten over your sulks, there's something in here I'd like you to clear up for me."

Dichotomy once more. I wanted to take root where I was, but she had me walking to the bedroom. She truly was glowing. As if she'd lightly sprayed herself over with something mildly luminous. I guessed what would be in the bedroom, and I'd begun retching, but, already despoiled of filling, that didn't matter. Soon I was in the doorway and she said, "Stop that, Tacey." And I stopped retching and stood and looked at what remained of the beautiful black medic, wrapped up in the bloodstained lionskin.

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Lions drink blood, not roses.

Something loosened inside me then. It was probably the final submission, the final surrender of the fight. Presumably I'd been fighting her subconsciously from the start, or I wouldn't have gained the ragged half-freedoms I had. But now I was limp and sodden, so I could ask humbly: "The plant was salad. But a man—what was he?"

"You don't quite get it, darling, do you?" Carla said. She stroked my hair friendlily. I didn't shudder any more. Cowed dog, I was relaxed under the contemptuous affection of my mistress. "One was green and vegetable. One was black, male, and meat. Different forms. Local dishes. I had no inclination to sample you, you comprehend, since you were approximate to my own appearance. But of course, others who find themselves to be black and male, may wish to sample pale-skinned females. Don't worry, Tacey. You'll be safe. You entertain me. You're mine. Protected species."

"Still don't understand, Carla," I whispered meekly.

"Well, just clear up for me, and I'll explain."

I don't have to apologise to you for what I did then, because, of course, you know all about it, the will-less indifference of the absolute slave. I bundled up the relics of Carla's lover-breakfast, and dumped them in the waste-disposal, which dealt with them pretty efficiently.

Then I cleaned the bedroom, and had a shower, and fixed Carla some coffee and biscuits. It was almost noon, the hour when the four thousand and ninety were going to be roused, and to step from their frost boxes in front of seven-eighths of the world's Spatial-viewers. Carla wanted to see it too, so I switched on my set, minus the sound. Next Carla told me I might sit, and I sat on a pillow, and she explained.

For some reason, I don't remember her actual words. Perhaps she put it in a technical way and I got the gist but not the sentences. I'll put it in my own words here, despite the fact that a lot of you know now anyway. After all, under supervision, we still have babies sometimes. When they grow up they'll need to know. Know why they haven't got a chance, and why we hadn't. And, to level with you, know why I'm not a Judas, and that I didn't betray us, because I didn't have a chance either.

Laziness, optimism, and blind stupidity.

I suppose optimism more than anything.

Four thousand and ninety-one persons lying down in frozen

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stasis, aware they didn't have souls and couldn't otherwise survive, dreaming of a future of cures, and of a re-awakening in that future. And the earth dreaming of benevolent visitors from other worlds, father-mother figures to guide and help us. Sending them buzz-whuzzes to bleep, over and over, *Here* we are. *Here. Here.*

I guess we do have souls. Or we have something that has nothing to do with the brain, or the nerve centers, or the spinal cord. Perhaps that dies too, when we die. Or perhaps it escapes. Whatever happens, that's the one thing you can't retain in Cryogenic Suspension. The body, all its valves and ducts and organs, lies pristine in limbo, and when you wake it up with the correct drugs, impulses, stimuli, it's live again, can be cured of its diseases, becoming a flawless vessel of—nothing. It's like an empty room, a vacant lot. The tenant's skipped.

Somewhere out in the starry night of space, one of the bleeping buzz-whuzzes was intercepted. Not by pater-mater figures, but by a predatory, bellicose alien race. It was simple to get to us—hadn't we given comprehensive directions? But on arrival they perceived a world totally unsuited to their fiery, gaseous, incorporeal forms. That was a blow, that was. But they didn't give up hope. Along with their superior technology they developed a process whereby they reckoned they could transfer inside of human bodies, and thereafter live off the fat of the Terrain. However, said process wouldn't work. Why not? The human consciouness (soul?) was too strong to overcome, it wouldn't let them through. Even asleep, they couldn't oust us. Dormant, the consciousness (soul?) is still present, or at least linked. As for dead bodies, no go. A man who had expired of old age, or with a mobile on top of him was no use. The body had to be a whole one, or there was no point. Up in their saucers, which were periodically spotted, they spat and swore. They gazed at the earth and drooled, pondering mastery of a globe, and entire races of slaves at their disposal. But there was no way they could acheive their aims until—until they learned of all those Cryogenic Suspensions in their frost boxes, all those soulless lumps of ice, waiting on the day when science would release and cure them and bring them forth healthy and *void.*

If you haven't got a tenant, advertize for a new tenant. We had. And they'd come.

Carla was the first. As her eyes opened under the crystal, something looked out of them. Not Carla Brice. Not any more. But something.

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Curious, cruel, powerful, indomitable, alien, deadly.

Alone, she could handle hundreds of us humans, for her influence ascended virtually minute by minute. Soon there were going to be four thousand and ninety of her kind, opening their eyes, smiling their scornful thank-yous through the Spatials at the world they had come to conquer. The world they did conquer.

We gave them beautiful, healthy, moveable houses to live in, and billions to serve them and be toyed with by them, and provide them with extra bodies to be frozen and made fit to house any left-over colleagues of theirs. And our green de-polluted meadows wherein to rejoice.

As for Carla, she'd kept quiet and careful as long as she had to. Long enough for the tests to go through and for her to communicate back, telepathically, to her people, all the data they might require on earth, prior to their arrival.

And now she sat and considered me, meteoric fiery Carla-who-wasn't-Carla, her eyes, in the dark, gleaming topaz yellow through their copper irises, revealing her basic inflammable nature within the veil of a dead woman's living flesh.

They can make me do whatever they want, and they made me write this. Nothing utterly bad has been done to me, and maybe it never will. So I've been lucky there.

To them, I'm historically interesting, as Carla had been historically interesting to us, as a first. I'm the first Slave. Possibly, I can stay alive on the strength of that and not be killed for a whim.

Which, in a way, I suppose, means I'm a sort of a success, after all.

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THE SHOP ON BEDFORD STREET
by Martin Gardner

Mr. Gardner's puzzle, this time around, involves mathematics, money, and the price of old-&-rare science fiction magazines . . .

I was ambling along Bedford Street in New York City's Greenwich Village, searching for the hidden entrance to Chumley's restaurant, when I passed a curious little shop that I had never noticed before. It was about two yards wide, even smaller than the narrow brownstone house on Bedford where Edna St. Vincent Millay burned her candle at both ends. A crudely-lettered sign in the shop's unwashed window said nothing more than "Old SF and Fantasy Magazines."

I pushed open a decaying door. Behind a cluttered desk a gnomelike old man was snoring uncouthly.

"Do you have," I said loudly, "any copies of *Amazing Stories* prior to 1950?"

Two watery blue eyes opened slowly. The old man glowered at me while he picked his left ear with a mechanical pencil. "Of course."

He stood up wearily and climbed a creaky stepladder to take from a high shelf a stack of *Amazing Stories*. They seemed in amazingly good condition, no two alike, and all dated from 1926 through 1949.

"The latest issue costs a dollar," the old man said. "The next costs three dollars, the next five, and so on in consecutive odd numbers. It's not a complete run. Lots of issues are missing. But you have to buy them all."

I counted the magazines and scribbled a calculation on the back of an envelope.

"I can't afford it."

"In that case," said the gnome, "I'll let you figure the price differently. You can divide the stack into two parts in any way you like, and pay for each according to the same system—a dollar for one, three dollars for two, five for three, and so on. I'll take a personal check, but you have to raise the amount to a multiple of a hundred dollars."

I doubt if the old man knew who I was, but in any case his crazy

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pricing scheme appealed to my fondness for number puzzles. I divided the stack so the total cost was as low as possible. To this price I added enough to bring it up to a multiple of a hundred, then I wrote a check. After looking over my driver's license and all of my charge cards the gnome tied the dusty magazines into bundles, and I carried them to my car parked around the corner on Grove street.

During dinner with my wife at Chumley's—she was annoyed by my being late—I told her about the bizarre bargain.

"Some bargain!" she said. "How much was the gratuity? I mean, how much did you add to the price to bring it up to a multiple of a hundred?"

"Let me put it this way," I said. "For one magazine, and only one, I paid exactly five times as much in dollars as your age."

"If you think I'm going to try to figure *that* out," she said, "you're nuttier than usual."

How many dollars did the old man get as a gratuity? See page 57 for the answer.

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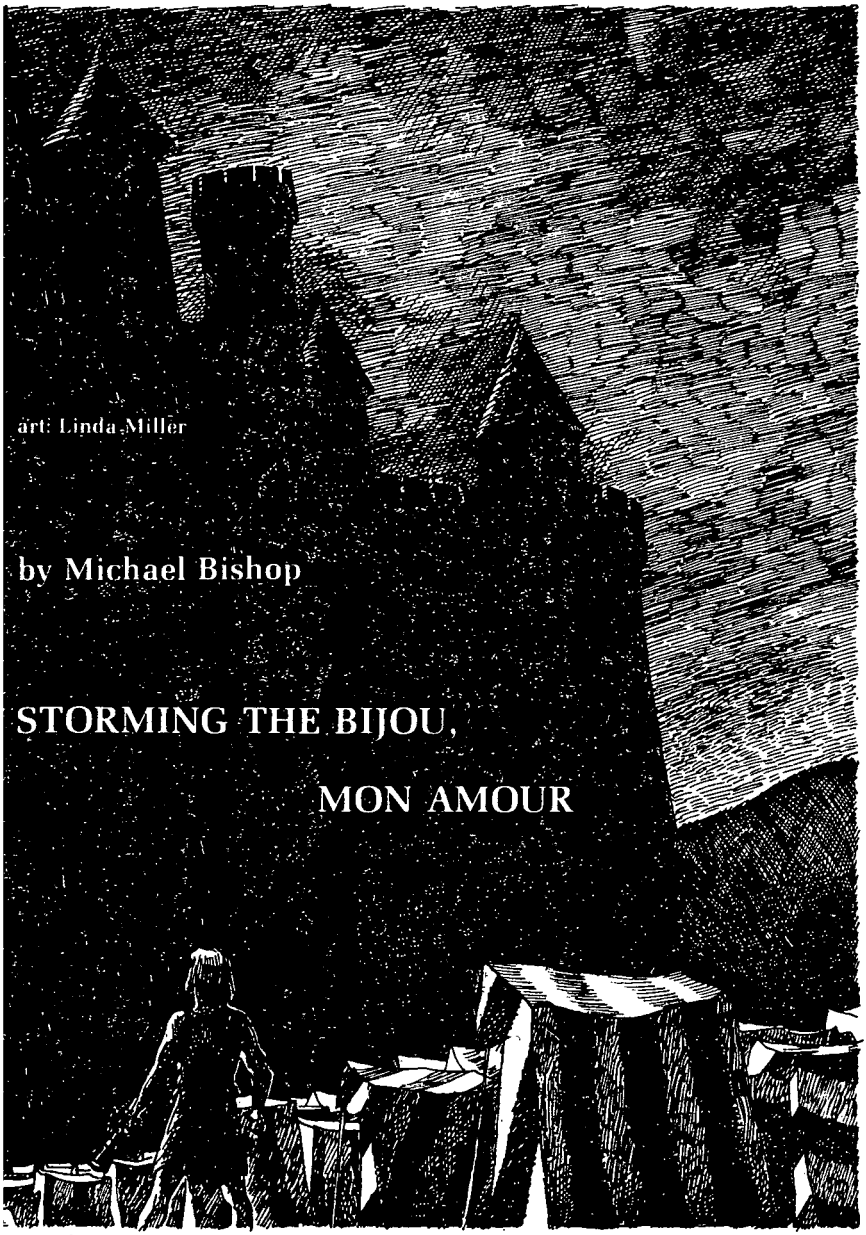

art: Linda Miller

by Michael Bishop

STORMING THE BIJOU, MON AMOUR

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The author tells us that in addition to Catacomb Years, *recently published by Berkley/Puttman, there is another novel,* Death and Designation Among the Asadi *and* Blooded on Arachne, *a collection of short stories, coming out from that publisher. Mr. Bishop also reports that he and his wife returned safely from a vacation in New Guernsey, a place quite as strange as this story's locale.*

The world and its central valley were called Pit. In this valley lived the despised groundlings of the omnipotent Count De Mille. The Pittites were ordinary human beings who made their livings in resolute peasant fashion, watching the endless round of motion pictures that Count De Mille showed in the great open windows of the Castle Bijou. This ancient and prodigious establishment rose high into the dark from the valley's northern cliffs; and because the sun never shone on Pit (dusk being the world's closest approximation to daylight), the battlements of the Castle Bijou hovered above the groundlings like the immense, shadowy digits of an obscene gesture.

Night after unending night, shrouded in the acoustic darkness, the Pittites gazed numbly at the castle's windows. Doris Day, Toshiro Mifune, Randolph Scott, Lillian Gish, Max von Sydow, or maybe Mia Farrow—figures as tall as Titans—would stalk from room to room, now and again booming out speeches of incomprehensible urgency or tenderness. It seemed, in fact, that a pantheon of thespian gods lived, died, and underwent resurrection in the huge fenestrae and oriels of Castle Bijou's facade.

It was a hard life, if you were a Pittite. You could break from your mother's womb during *The Birth of a Nation,* experience your first kiss as Sidney Poitier sat down to dinner, and succumb to your own private Bergman metaphor as Robert Taylor defended Bataan. (The groundlings referred to dying, quite earnestly, as "embracing Bengt.") And what was your reward for such a life? The barest necessities. A watching cabana. A sufficient number of

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canvas-backed chairs to seat your family. Enough tattered costumes to cloak your nakedness. And just enough popcorn and cola to keep the specter of starvation at bay.

After you had gazed obediently at your eighty to a hundred films a week, uniformed hushars on horseback rode out of Pit's rearward concession stands to distribute your earnings, with an occasional grudging bonus for interminable epics like the Russian *War and Peace* and D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*. Other hushars, probing the dark with their flashlight truncheons, would gallop from watching cabana to watching cabana to insure that the groundlings in their territories were indeed watching. Meanwhile, oceanically, the scores of Mancini, Tiomkin, Steiner, or Legrand swept through Pit like syncopated or raging combers—so that on the aisleways of the inescapable valley theater the hoof beats of the hushars' horses were seldom audible.

No matter. If you were a Pittite, you kept your eyes on Elvis or Marcello and ignored the flashlight beams slicing up the dark. The greatest happiness you could hope to know was to draw your final breath during the ascension scenes in *King of Kings* or *Mary Poppins*. . . .

"I can't stand it anymore," said Gary Cooper Seymour, the patriarch of the Seymour groundlings. He tipped his popcorn box over and let his cola trickle onto their watching cabana's hard-packed dirt floor.

It was night (it was always night), and the movie jumping between the windows of Castle Bijou was *The Return of Doctor X* with Humphrey Bogart. The god himself wore a streak of peroxide in his hair, a laboratory smock buttoned along one shoulder and down the side, and a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. He was not an appealing sight.

"I can't stand it anymore," G.C. Seymour repeated.

"Shhhh," hissed Cissy Spacek Seymour, his only daughter; and G.C. didn't know whether she was shushing him because she was really watching the movie or because a hushar might be riding nigh.

The other folks at the Seymour cabana (left rear center, on the west side of Pit) were G.C.'s wife, Zsa Zsa Gabor Seymour, and his two teen-age sons, Oliver Hardy and Clint Eastwood Seymour. It had long since occurred to G.C. that none of them much resembled their namesakes, but since they spent only a minimal amount of time looking at one another anyway, the discrepancies

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were of small consequence. The Seymours were all thin and waxen-faced, with bad teeth and sore gums; and everyone's eyeballs glistened so unhealthily that they might have been shellacked.

"This is the second time since Cissy was born that we've seen this turkey," Gary Cooper Seymour groused. He was 301,614 movies old and not getting any younger.

"Groundlings eat their popcorn in the fatigue of their eyeballs," recited Mrs. Seymour philosophically. "So saith the Count."

"Balls to the Count."

"Careful, Dad," cautioned Clint Eastwood Seymour.

In the cabana adjacent to the Seymours, Hermione Gingold Gazehard leaned over her rail and said, "Will you picture-show party-poopers please shut up? Little Tatum's never seen this one before."

"Balls to little Tatum, too." But G.C. was no fool. He whispered this retort and once more slotted his eyes on the smirking histrionics of the Mysterious Doctor Xavier.

"What do you want us to do?" asked Oliver Hardy Seymour in a whisper even more discreet than his father's. "It's watch or die, Dad."

G.C. could not argue with that. In two equally effective ways, it was watch or die. If you could not validate your eighty to a hundred movies a week on the Count's screening examinations (questions were flashed in the windows of Castle Bijou, and you responded on a portable piezoelectric response board), you forfeited your weekly rations. And if you were ever caught either snoring in your chair or fleering at the gods and goddesses illumined hieratically against the night, a hushar would unholster his deadly pistolmatic, shoot your picture, and so deprive you of your soul. To the far south of Pit, indeed, was a graveyard of canvas-backed director's chairs, each with the photograph of a departed groundling displayed conspicuously on its back. During the Count's biannual Intermissions you could make pilgrimages there to visit these rickety folding memorials to your snapped relations. (And, of course, to strike up feeble live relationships with the other pilgrims milling among the chairs. That was how Gary Cooper Seymour had first met Zsa Zsa Gabor Numbrump.) So, yes, Oliver Hardy was right—it was watch or die.

"Don't you think I know that?" G.C. asked his family *sotto voce*. "I saw the hushars take my mother's photograph when she moaned aloud and toppled out of her chair during the last ten

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minutes of *The Nutty Professor.* It was brutal. The hushars—three of them—rode up to our cabana, and they *all* took pictures, each from a different angle. My mother's soul was extracted from her in pieces, like a pulverized wisdom tooth." Silently, without covering his face, G.C. Seymour began to weep. His mother—Maria Ouspenskaya Seymour—had been a wonderful woman.

"But what happened to . . . to her . . . to her body?" Cissy Spacek Seymour asked cautiously, her eyes still on the images flickering like a black-and-white conflagration in the windows of the Castle Bijou.

Neither G.C. nor Zsa Zsa had ever told Cissy the facts of death, and the Count's next Intermission was well over 400 films in the future. Perhaps this was as good a time as any.

"The body is an illusion," G.C. whispered fiercely, wiping his tears away and pulling himself up in his chair. "The reality is the soul, which can be externalized only by film. The souls of gods and goddesses—" G.C. gestured at the massive castle on the cliffs. "—are shown forth in images that move eternally. But those of groundlings like the Seymours and the Numbrumps are picked out of us and put on display in *stills.* The gods' souls are vibrant, Cissy, while ours are immobile and monochrome."

No one spoke, except Doctor Xavier. And what Doctor Xavier said was of no importance to the Seymours.

"My mother's body," G.C. went on, gripping the arms of his chair, "underwent a prolonged and somewhat out-of-focus fade-out. And that, my Cissy, is what we all have in store."

Cissy began to cry.

"So what do you want us to do?" urged Oliver Hardy again. "We keep body and soul together by faithful worship. Do you want us to give that up and put ourselves in the way of embracing Bengt? Surely you can't have that in mind."

"The Seven Samurai," said G.C. *"The Dirty Dozen."*

"What's he talking about?" asked Clint Eastwood Seymour.

"Violence," murmured Zsa Zsa speculatively. "Insurrection."

"Guns in the Afternoon," intoned G.C. dazedly. *"The Wild Bunch. Straw Dogs. Bring Me the Head of—"*

"Shhhhhh," hissed Cissy, frightened. "Shhhhhhhhhhh!"

Two and a half movies later a trio of hushars rode up. *Friendly Persuasion* was lambent in the windows of Castle Bijou, and Gary Cooper Seymour, in partial deference to the performance of his namesake, was holding his tongue and observing the film with

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rapt dissatisfaction. When the hushars arrived, he heard their snorting horses and looked up to see what sort of change they were going to wreak in his life.

The hushars were uniformed as cowboys (they were always uniformed as cowboys), and the foremost among them dismounted deliberately and approached the Seymour cabana tugging on the belt of his pistolmatic and slapping his chaps with his flashlight truncheon. It was too dark to see his face.

"Seems peaceful enough hereabouts," the man said approvingly. "But we've had a complaint. Seems you folks were disrupting other folks' enjoyment of our programming."

The Seymours maintained a noncommittal silence.

"You got any grass around this here cabana?" the hushar suddenly asked. "I'd sure like to let Trigger graze."

Mrs. Seymour indicated a swatch of ground on the west side of their shelter. Soon Trigger, Silver, and Tony were all nibbling contentedly at the thin grey sprouts of nightgrass there, and the trio of hushars had all come under the dilapidated awning of the Seymours' cabana.

"Everything seems to be in good order here," said the first hushar, shining his flashlight truncheon about and letting his spurs jingle. "Don't see why anybody'd phone in to complain."

"I phoned better than two movies ago," cried Hermione Gingold Gazehard from the cabana next door.

"Well, we was busy then, ma'am."

"I don't see that that's any excuse when you consider that—"

One of the hushar's companions shone his flashlight truncheon into Mrs. Gazehard's contorted face, whereupon the third hushar slapped his pistolmatic from its holster and took the woman's picture.

The Seymours, startled, watched their suddenly soulless neighbor fade out of existence like the Cheshire cat in Disney's animated *Alice*. G.C. was glad he'd had an opportunity to talk to Cissy before she witnessed the brutal thing for herself. Thank your lucky stars for small favors.

"What's playing?" the first hushar then inquired amiably.

Oliver Hardy Seymour told him.

"Is that right?" the hushar said. "My name's Gary Cooper Bounzzemout. I haven't seen one of my namesake's movies since I was a little chap. *The Fountainhead,* I think it was."

Of course the Seymours instantly adverted that their patriarch's name was also Gary Cooper, and this revelation made for

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an uncanny abundance of good feeling. G.C. Bounzzemout introduced his companions, Leo Gorcey Gallup and Sessue Hayakawa Harassman (thereby proving that the cowboyishly attired hushars weren't necessarily named after cowboy gods); and, these introductions out of the way, everyone got along famously. When his print had developed, in fact, S.H. Harassman showed the Seymours Mrs. Gazehard's freshly stolen soul.

"Nice likeness," said Oliver Hardy Seymour.

"That woman was the likeness," the hushar corrected him. "But this—well, this is the genuine article."

"Couldn't we get in trouble talking and carrying on like this?" asked Mrs. Seymour, glancing beyond the grazing horses at the cabana of the Cantinflas Wrinklebrows. "I mean, this isn't Intermission, you know."

"You bet your butt it isn't," said Gary Cooper Bounzzemout. "What I wouldn't give to sit down here and see me a decent movie for the first time in forty thousand flicks. What I wouldn't give."

"Me, too," seconded Leo Gorcey Gallup.

"Me, too," echoed Sessue Hayakawa Harassman.

"What about your horses, your outfits, your pistolmatics, and your flashlight truncheons?" proposed G.C. Seymour hurriedly. "My boys and I could go out for a ride while you fellas took our places alongside the womenfolk. Stand-ins, you could call it. Or sit-ins. Seems a pretty fair trade-off to me."

"I want to go," said Cissy. "Why shouldn't *I* go?"

"And I," echoed Mrs. Seymour. "Why shouldn't *I*?"

"It ain't done," said G.C. grimly. He looked to the surprised but amazingly acquiescent hushars for support.

"No, ma'am," G.C. Bounzzemout agreed. "It just ain't done. A woman just don't know what to do with a flashlight truncheon."

Sessue Hayakawa Harassman and Leo Grocey Gallup murmured their agreement, quite respectfully; and the ladies reluctantly subsided.

One third of a reel later, G.C. Seymour and his sons Oliver and Clint, outfitted like hushars, were spurring their mounts into the gloomy central aisle of the world-basin known to their people as Pit. The cabanas of the downtrodden groundlings seethed in the dark like popcorn kernels the moment before they bloom. And the cliffs upon which rested the stolid bulk of the Castle Bijou loomed dauntingly.

Maybe, thought G.C. as they rode, maybe, old boy, you've bit off more than you can chew. . . .

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For two movies Gary Cooper Seymour and his sons rode northward. Castle Bijou got bigger and bigger, as did the gods and goddesses lounging or cavorting in its gothic oriels. Movie music boomed out across the valley with a volume positively world-quaking—so that G.C. began to understand why a great many front-row-center groundlings who gathered during Intermission in Pit's chair-cluttered cemetery were hopelessly deaf. You could communicate with them only by pantomime. As a consequence, it did not seem likely that he and the boys were going to be able to recruit a peasant army to storm the Count's Citadel of Celluloid Fancies.

Damn, groused G.C. in the privacy of his own mind.

All about them, the cabanas of the Pittites and the angular silhouettes of a thousand watchers in the dark. Even in the films of Buñuel, Ray, or Fellini, G.C. had never seen anything quite so lonely or provocative of compassion. These were his people, these sedentary groundlings. He loved them. Why were their lives so passive, so monochrome, so devoid of struggle and passion? And why, except during brief moments of crisis, did they not seem to notice. . . ?

"Pa," shouted Oliver Hardy Seymour (the boys had stopped calling him "Dad" the moment they were horseback); "Pa, there's a posse of hushars riding toward us from the orchestra pit!"

"Get ready to slap leather, then!"

Six fat flashlight beams picked them out and blinded them. A moment later they were surrounded by just as many hushars astride just as many horses. G.C. and his boys blinked and bridled their mounts.

"You Gary Cooper Bounzzemout?" a husky voice inquired.

"Yep," G.C. lied uprightly.

"You're out of your territory, then; and you shoulda responded to Mrs. Gazehard's complaint all the way back during the second reel of that Bogart turkey. I'm afraid we're going to have to scramble your wavefront reconstructions, fellas, until the Count sees fit to give you back your interference fringes."

G.C. had no idea what the man was talking about, but it didn't sound good. It sounded pretty damn scary.

"Now!" he shouted to Oliver and Clint. "Take pictures of their horses!"

Snapping photographs of all six horses with their pistolmatics, the boys were as quick as Kodaks. The hushars didn't know what hit them, but hung in the air above their fast-fading mounts like

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drop-mouthed marionettes. They were weirdly nonexistent below the chest or waist because it's impossible to separate the lower portion of a rider from his horse when you're taking a picture mostly of the horse. (The horses, by the way, had been nibbling nightgrass when their pictures were taken, noses right down to the ground.) So. The heads and torsos of these unmanned hushars floated helplessly above the valley's central aisle, and G.C. and his boys pretty much had their way with them.

"You sure got the drop on us," growled the hushar who had threatened them with some sort of dastardly disassembly.

Gary Cooper Seymour confessed his and his sons' real identities and asked the hushar about his incomprehensible but unsettling threat.

"Well," this man responded, "a hushar is a self-motivating hologram, subject to the Count's ultimate control. Punishment for unhusharly behavior is the withdrawal of the laser light that produces our interference fringes. For their goldbricking, Bounzzemout, Gallup, and Harassman were going to be knocked out of existence for fifteen or twenty movies—but you fellas shot our hosses out from under us and disappeared our feet."

"We stole a half of each one of your souls," gloated Clint.

"Souls are indivisible," returned the severed hushar. "And, in any case, being holograms, we don't have any."

"He's right, Pa," said Oliver, shining his flashlight truncheon on one of the developing prints. "Look. Their boots and chaps don't register—there's nothing but horses here."

"Where are your souls?" G.C. demanded.

"The hologramming process stole them, I'm afraid, and the original interference patterns are in Count De Mille's possession. That's why we hushars pretty much hop to the Count's bidding. He's got the *real* us in his fists, you see."

"That's terrible!" Oliver declared.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the hushar. "It ain't as bad as owning your own soul but having to endure half a million movies."

The other hushar heads vigorously nodded their assent, and G.C., even though he and his boys had set out to do something about the life style of the groundlings, almost found himself defending it.

Instead he asked, "In which part of the Castle Bijou does the Count hole up?"

"No one's ever seen the Count," the hushar volunteered. "None of us has ever been up there, anyway." The man's head and torso

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revolved back toward the south. "We bunk in the concession stands over by the cemetery, you know."

G.C. touched the brim of his hat. "Much obliged. Come on, boys. We'll have to storm the Bijou by ourselves." They spurred their horses past the suspended heads and chests of the dismayed hushars.

"You can't leave us here like this!" shouted the truncated minions of Count De Mille. "You can't!"

"Just see if I don't," murmured Gary Cooper Seymour.

And high on the northern cliffs of Pit one of the films of Michelangelo Antonioni leisurely unraveled.

G.C. Oliver, and Clint dismounted at the foot of the cliffs and manfully proceeded to scale them. To reach a ledge just below the summit took eight full-length feature films, a couple of canisters of Warner Brothers' cartoons, and an early Roman Polanski vignette. The soundtracks of these offerings blared forth at such volume that no verbal communication was possible. Often G.C. would look back over his shoulder to take in the panorama of the valley: row upon row of watching cabanas arrayed in flickering squalor. Could Zsa Zsa and Cissy see the boys and him crawling painfully up the cliff face? Probably not. Straining to find a new handhold, G.C. began to realize why no one had "stormed" the Castle Bijou before.

Near the summit Clint Eastwood Seymour lost his balance and toppled backward into the dark, pulling his brother with him in a last desperate attempt to keep from falling. G.C. could not hear their screams as they plummeted—a deprivation which undoubtedly helped preserve his presence of mind. He unholstered his pistolmatic and took the boys' pictures before they struck bottom, thus sparing them the mortal discomfort of impact. If he ever got back to his cabana, he would have their photographs to show his wife and daughter. Two minute, spreadeagled blurs on an abyss of indefinite depth.

Well, thought G.C. grimly, now it's just you and the Count.

Encouraged by the aesthetic fitness of this imagined confrontation, he found foot- and hand-holds enough to attain the top of the escarpment. Then he strolled along it in the confusion of eddying lights thrown down from the Castle Bijou's windows. The gods and goddesses above him were too huge to identify. Where was an entrance? Where a way in?

At last G.C. saw the central gateway of the Castle Bijou and

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headed toward it. As he crept through, reflexively ducking his head in an opening of seemingly immeasurable height, he felt a sudden rippling of wind and glanced up to see the castle's portcullis dropping upon him like the blade of a guillotine. He dove and rolled. Even through the din and dialogue of the movie playing overhead, he heard the portentous clang of the portcullis.

"Jeepers," whispered G.C. "That was close."

He was inside the Castle Bijou, but as he rose to his feet he found that only a short distance beyond him the floor dropped away into a void of absolute nothingness. Here the world ended, and all he could see across the void was the prismatic beam of the Cosmic Projector that animated the windows of the castle.

This beam blazed in the darkness like a sun, a great white hole emptying a multiverse of backwards images into the visions of the Pittites. As he stood transfixed on the edge of his world, this beam seemed to Gary Cooper Seymour the repository and purveyor of all experience. He had come behind the scrim of his and his people's desperately passive lives to the reality sustaining them all. The Castle Bijou, with its battlements and bulwarks, was a cardboard-and-silk false front, a facade whose backside revealed its supports and scaffoldings. G.C. took in the indisputable testimony of his eyes with a weary shudder.

As if aware of his presence, the images being projected across the void suddenly began to stutter madly. They hiccupped, jerked, and danced. Eventually they gave a final unsprocketed shimmy and stopped moving altogether. Frozen in the windows of the Castle Bijou was a single frame of a movie that G.C. was in no position to put a name to. All was still and silent—for the first time since Pit's last official Intermission.

Sternly and resonantly, a voice high above Gary Cooper Seymour inquired, "What are you doing up here?"

G.C. looked up and saw a man seated in a plastic bucket on the end of an articulate metal arm on the vertical shaft of a spidery mobile crane. The man was small and solid, with a bald round head and fierce eyebrows and mustachioes. He wore a beret and riding breeches. He was sharply delineated in the razor-edged light of the Cosmic Projector, and he waved his megaphone with a comfortable awareness of his authority. After he had repeated his initial question two more times and maneuvered his bucket-chair close enough to hear G.C.'s response, the upstart groundling remarked, "You're Count De Mille?"

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"I am," the Count acknowledged. "What of it?"

"*The Wizard of Oz*," intoned Gary Cooper Seymour under his breath, at last grateful for the haphazard catholicity of his education.

"What? Speak up!"

"You're a humbug, Count," drawled G.C. emphatically. "You're a little man with no more brains or spunk than any red-eyed groundling down there in Pit, and I'm going to show you up for what you really are." He drew his pistolmatic and pointed it directly at the Count's bald head.

"Let's not be hasty," blustered the Count. "Let's not—"

"You're not a hologram, are you?"

"No, I'm certainly not a hol—"

Click.

G.C. waited for Count De Mille, whom he had expertly centered in the pistolmatic's view finder, to fade from view. He waited and waited. The Count continued to inhabit his bucket-chair, his legs and boots hanging down like knobby, twisted question marks.

"It seems you're out of film," the Count said sympathetically.

Grimacing, G.C. pivoted and hurled his useless pistolmatic into the void. It was instantly swallowed and lost. Then he returned his gaze to the spiffy little Count, who powered his bucket-chair out over the edge of the world and halted it there. He was cantilevered above the unfathomable abyss and nimbused in the beam of the sunlike projector. G.C., again turning about, had to shield his eyes to look at his adversary.

"What would you have done had you indeed stolen my soul?" asked the Count. "What would you have done if I were no longer here to select and project life's experiences at you in endless, virtually unbroken sequence? Tell me that, if you please."

"You select what we see?" G.C. inquired, already knowing the answer.

"I do."

"But there's no sense nor sequence to it," he pointed out with what seemed to him killing and irrefutable logic.

"No *unifying* sense nor sequence, you must mean. For of course each individual unit of filmic experience I call up for you is internally structured according to the dictates of the creative intelligence responsible for it. I'm here to keep things going, sir, not to impose an impossible order on the whole. And what would you do if I didn't keep things going, please?"

H.C. blinked and stood gawking into the circular glare at whose

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heart the Count, dangling his legs, sat confident and inaccessible.

"Supposing, of course," the Count went on, "that all your most basic needs were still provided for?"

"We'd live," said Gary Cooper Seymour. "What else?"

"Here on Pit?" the Count demanded incredulously. "*Here on Pit?* Why, even I don't have that option, sir."

He pushed a button on the arm of his bucket-chair, and the beam from the Cosmic Projector failed, plunging the entire universe into an impenetrable, prechaotic darkness.

The Castle Bijou disappeared into this formless murk along with everything else, whereupon there arose from the groundlings in Pit a gasp of staggering volume, a babble of dismay and terror so unlike anything G.C. had ever heard on a movie soundtrack that it took him a moment or two to recognize it for what it was. Even during Intermissions, he recalled, the Count had not doused *all* the lights in Castle Bijou's windows. Afraid that another step might send him plummeting as his dear lost sons had plummeted, G.C. stood stock-still and waited.

"Now live," said the Count from utter darkness. "Go ahead and live. And should you discover a way, please be sure to let me in on the secret. Your reference to *The Wizard of Oz* was astute in its own limited way, but nevertheless inaccurate as a description of my actual status."

Growing terrified as the babble from Pit became more and more disjointed and ugly, G.C. said nothing.

"I'm not a humbug, sir—I'm the alternately malign and benevolent lackey of an impulse more human and more powerful than any of your poor, put-upon Pittites."

"What impulse?" asked Gary Cooper Seymour tremulously.

But Count De Mille only laughed, and his laughter escaped his megaphone as a thunderous music at once amiable and malefic. G.C. sank to his knees in the scrabble of the narrow cliff and hung on for dear life.

Some time later, after an interval of unconsciousness, G.C. felt himself being scooped up from the cliff and transported giddily across light-years of space and aeons of time by an immense but curiously gentle hand. Like Fay Wray in the clutches of her moonstruck giant ape, thought G.C. desperately. Meanwhile, unbroken emptiness roared by.

"Where we goin'?" G.C. at last demanded in a small, even drawl that belied his terror.

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No response. Only darkness and the whipping slipstream of all-encompassing vacuum as the bodiless hand bore him onward.

When the hand finally swung him to a halt, G.C. rolled up the retaining wall of its curled fingers and then slid back down into the cup of its palm.

"*Lights!*" commanded a voice that wasn't the Count's.

As a feeble wash of illumination from some disembodied source pushed the darkness aside, G.C. raised himself warily to his feet. He saw that an ethereal hand did indeed hold him aloft and that spread out beneath both it and him in the riven void was the unfamiliar nightscape of another world.

"This is Wasteland," said the voice that wasn't the Count's.

Then, so loudly that a hundred constellations trembled like cobwebs in a wind, this voice commanded, "*Camera! Action!*"

Gazing down, G.C. saw that the groundlings of Wasteland were enclosed not in a valley surmounted at one end by a castle with flickering windows but instead in a great sunken living room surrounded on all sides by television screens. Playing simultaneously to the hapless, narcotized inhabitants of this nightmare world were overlapping reruns of "Love of Life," "Hee Haw," "Charlie's Angels," "Gilligan's Island," "Dragnet," "Beat the Clock," "Happy Days"—

"Take me home," G.C. Seymour pleaded pridelessly, again sinking to his knees. "I beg you, take me home."

Five seconds or a dozen centuries later he opened his eyes and found himself seated in his watching cabana beside Zsa Zsa, Cissy, and his miraculously resurrected sons. High in the windows of the Castle Bijou blazed the upright lie of Zinnemann's *High Noon*.

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THROUGH TIME AND SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT !!!

by Grendel Briarton

art: Tim Kirk

This—ah—thing should perhaps be referred to as Feghoot XXIV-a, for reasons explained in the footnote.

Many years after Ferdinand Feghoot discovered the *dzop*, the strange flying bird-plants of Golightly III, he was asked by Dr. Gropius Volkswagen, a fellow member of the Time Travellers Club, how he had saved himself when the queen of the abominable aborigines demanded that he catch freshly laid *dzop* eggs and make ritual charms out of them.

"It was really quite easy," Feghoot told him. "*Dzop* eggs are modified seed pods, under enormous pressure. When the flocks find their blue nesting trees, this becomes unendurable. Then each *dzop* aims her tail at her tree and lets go. The eggs bury themselves in the trees at a velocity of over 2800 feet per second. Trying to catch them would be exceedingly hazardous, but I could never have admitted this because the Queen thought me a mighty magician, so I just pointed out that you can't make an amulet with out-breaking eggs."*

"But how were you *sure* you couldn't have caught them?" the doctor persisted. "Did you actually *try*?"

"Of course not," said Ferdinand Feghoot. "I was simply giving the queen my egg-spurt opinion."

*See Feghoot XXIV, in *The Compleat Feghoot* (The Mirage Press, Baltimore, 1975.)

ANSWER TO THE SHOP ON BEDFORD STREET (from page 41)

The sum of any consecutive sequence of x odd numbers starting with 1 is x^2. For example, the sum of $1 + 3 + 5 = 3^2 = 9$.

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To minimize the total cost of the magazines it is necessary to divide them as nearly in half as possible. Had there been an even number of magazines, the two stacks would have been equal and each magazine in one stack would have a price duplicated by a magazine in the other. Because I told my wife that only one magazine cost five times her age, one stack must have contained one more magazine than the other.

Let x^2 be the price in dollars of the smaller stack and $(x + 1)^2$ be the price of the larger. The first stack contains x magazines, the second contains $x + 1$. The most expensive magazine in the larger stack (the only one not duplicated in price by another) costs $2x + 1$. We know that this amount is five times my wife's age. Let a be my wife's age. We can write the equation $2x + 1 = 5a$. Since the left side is clearly an odd number, then a must be odd. Rearranging terms, we can express x as equal to $(5a - 1)/2$.

The total cost of all the magazines is $x^2 + (x + 1)^2$. If for x we substitute the equivalent value of $(5a - 1)/2$, we get an expression that simplifies to:

$$\frac{25a^2 + 1}{2}$$

This is the total cost of the magazines where a is a positive odd integer.

Any positive odd integer can be expressed as $2n + 1$, where n is any positive integer not zero. Substituting this expression for a in the above formula gives us:

$$\frac{25(2n + 1)^2 + 1}{2}$$

which simplifies to $50(n^2 + n) + 13$. This is the total cost of the magazines in dollars where n is any nonnegative integer. Since $n^2 + n$ is always an even number, the total cost must be a multiple of 100 dollars with 13 dollars added to it. Therefore, to raise the total to a multiple of 100, the gratuity is always $100 - 13 = 87$ dollars regardless of my wife's age or how many magazines I bought!

(This beautiful problem, which seems impossible to solve because of insufficient data, was originated by Søren Hammer Jacobsen, of Denmark, who sent it to me in 1977 with permission to use.)

When I got home I discovered that the magazines were not in as good condition as I thought. One was missing pages 8, 9, 13, 27, 28, and 33. How many leaves had been torn from it? The answer is on page 111.

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HITCH ON THE BULL RUN

by Sharon Webb

art: Alex Schomburg

The author claims to have been found under a cabbage palm in Tampa, FL, on a rainy 29th of February. Read "See Spot Run" at age three; read SF at six; began writing fiction at age seven— but did not publish immediately. She now lives in the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains near Blairsville, GA; has three beautiful daughters and a brilliant husband; and is a registered nurse. Mrs. Webb is currently writing a non-fiction book titled When Do I Get to Feel like a Nurse?

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Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Oct. 8

Carmelita O'Hare, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Well, you were right. Go ahead. Say "I told you so," and get it over with. "Join the Interstellar Nurses' Corps and see the galaxy. . . ." Oh, Carmie, why didn't I listen to you? I've been on Taurus 14 for ten days now and there is absolutely nothing to do except work. The worst thing is there's no male homo-sape for just light years—unless you count Dr. Kelly-Bach and he's old. Carmie, he's really old. He has liver spots and his neck hangs in folds like that preserved turkey we had in anatomy lab in school.

There are only three homo-sapes on this whole tin can: Dr. Kelly-Bach, me, and Olga Ludowicki. And Olga is bitter—really bitter. She says the only reason she's a nurse is that she broke her toes when she was ten-and-a-half and ruined her ballet career. Carmie, if you could see Olga, you'd know why she broke her toes. It was from the sheer weight of her legs. If you ask me, Olga's fracture was ballet's gain.

I can hear you thinking, Carmie . . . "At least you have your work." Let me tell you something. Nursing here is not your run-of-the-mill thing. Remember how we giggled and laughed all through Alien Physiology? I'm not laughing now. This morning I had to prep an Aurigan's belly for surgery. You may not remember this, but Aurigans are *all* belly. There was Mrs. Redondaltff lying there on a mega bed like some vast termite queen. I had to use seventeen prep kits. And the surgery—a horror. Dr. Qotemire (he's chief-of-staff) operated, and he has the vilest temper you ever saw. He's just as sarcastic as he can be and when he gets really mad, he hisses and lashes his tail around the room. I almost tripped over it right in the middle of the operation.

It's enough to make you hate Aldebarans, except for Mrs. Qotemire. She's really very nice. She's pregnant, and she and Dr. Quotemire are very nervous over it. It's really kind of sweet once you get over the idea that she's going to have an egg instead

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of a baby.

Well, I really have to run. I've got so *much* to do when I'm off duty. Tonight after supper I can watch reruns of old holos in the rec hall and drink bogus beer. Seriously, if a man doesn't turn up on this bull run soon, I think I'll go stark star crazy. There is a light on the horizon though. Rumor has it that we're getting three Marines in for observation. Boy, do I plan to observe.

Love, Terra

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Oct. 13

Carmelita O'Hare, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Remember the Marines I told you about? They were Marines, all right: Capellan Marines. We had to put them in the starboard tanks in smelly old ammonia solution. Dr. Qotemire was a pain. He wanted me to check the filtration every fifteen minutes and check vital signs, too. If you think it's easy checking vital signs on Capellans—well, think again. My hands look like diaper rash from all that ammonia. Did you know that Capellans will eat only Capellan plankton? Well, I didn't either. Could I help it if dietary sent the wrong plankton? I, in good faith, gave them what dietary sent. Well, you should have heard Dr. Quotemire—"This-s-s is-s-s very serious-s-s nurse-s-s." Dr. Qotemire is getting harder to live with every day. He got so mad over the plankton he turned bluer than a ten-credit note. There's no telling what he'll be like next week. Mrs. Qotemire is due then.

I can't tell you what a disappointment it was about the Marines. The closest thing to humans that we have here are the patients from Hyades IV. They really look passable except for the creases where their noses ought to be, but their reproductive habits aren't like ours at all. *Not at all!* Look it up, Carmie. I'm not going to repeat it here.

On top of the trauma over the Marines, I discovered yesterday

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that I'm not going to get out of this chicken outfit in two years like I thought. When I signed up they told me it was for two orbits, but they didn't mean Earth orbits. Do you realize it takes twenty-seven Earth months for this tub to get around Nath? I am in despair. I'll be an old woman before I get off. An old, celibate woman. Carmie, I'm desperate. The other night I dreamed about Dr. Kelly-Bach.

Yours in despair,

Terra

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Nov. 2

Carmelita O'Hare, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

I am just not cut out for the pioneer life. I'm just not suited for it at all. When I heard from you I wept bitter tears. But I'm happy for you. Very happy. I hope you both enjoy. But when you and Mbotu laugh together, think of me, Terra Tarkington, exile from life.

Let me fill you in on my exciting existence. I returned yesterday from a twenty-four-hour pass. I went to Nath II (that's the only place we can go for a twenty-four-hour pass) and had an exciting tour of the robo mines. But the real highlight was a trip to the home for aging Aurigans. There they were, geriatric bellies all shriveled up, lying around watching the same old holos we see up here. Carmie, I am going mad.

Mrs. Qotemire went into labor last night and had her egg this morning. Mr. Qotemire was just ridiculous about the whole thing. Technically, Dr. Kelly-Bach was supposed to deliver her, but Dr. Qotemire kept interfering until I was afraid Dr. Kelly-Bach would have a stroke. Mrs. Qotemire kept hollering "O-o-sss, o-o-sss, o-o-sss," which, as you might gather, translates as "ouch."

When the egg came, Mrs. Qotemire was hysterical. She kept saying, "Is-s-s it all right? Is-s-s it cracked? I know it's-s-s

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cracked," until Dr. Qotemire picked it up and showed it to her. But she couldn't focus her eyes because of the sedation, so she kept on hollering. Dr. Qotemire stuck it up right under her snout and waved it around. "It is-s-s perfect. It is-s-s good egg." Then he *dropped* it. It's a good thing I was around to catch it in a receiving blanket. Honestly. You'd think it was the only egg ever laid.

Well, after I weighed it (1480 grams), and taped on the I.D. bracelet, I put it in the incubator. You know, Carmie, that's what was so depressing. I couldn't help but think about the babies in the incubators back on earth—little arms and legs waving around, little mouths crying, faces. Instead, there lay the Qotemire egg—it's sort of a magenta color—with absolutely no personality at all. It really got to me. You know what's worse? After it hatches, it's going to look like Dr. Qotemire.

Now for the rest of the news . . . Dr. Kelly-Bach is beginning to look good to me. Think of me, Carmie, in my darkest hour.

Bleakly yours,

Terra

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Nov. 17

Carmelita O'Hare, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Junior Qotemire hatched yesterday. Wonder of wonders, he doesn't look much like Dr. Qotemire. I suppose he will later on, but right now he's kind of cute. There was a big ceremony over the hatching, a sort of combination welcoming ceremony and circumcision. Junior Qotemire didn't like the circumcision part. He just wouldn't stop hissing. But when that was over and they gave him the ceremonial wafer to eat, he just chewed and crunched with his little bitty teeth. Everyone was there and made a big thing over him, especially all the Aldebaran nurses. After it was over, Junior Qotemire was all tuckered out and went to sleep with his little tail curled over his belly. He's really very sweet.

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Now the disgusting news. Dr. Kelly-Bach and Olga Ludowicki are in love. The fossil and the ballet machine. They walk around holding hands and kissing. Couldn't you just vomit? Lucky for me I'm not that hard up.

Bravely,

Terra

P.S. Carmie, I can't lie to you, a friend. I *am* hard up.

Terra

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Nov. 20

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

I know you and Mbotu will be very happy together. If you decide to have children and they need an honorary maiden aunt—well, you know where I am.

There isn't any good news from the bull run, so here goes with the bad, Dr. Kelly-Bach and Olga Ludowicki are going to be married and I am to be the maid of honor. Can you beat that? Now the real corker—Dr. Kelly-Bach took me aside and said that due to our circumstances he ought to offer to "service" both me and Olga, but due to his age and general condition he didn't think he was up to it. Oh, nausea. He then went on to say that he was taking a new kind of Aldebaran tonic and if it worked he'd let me know.

If that wasn't enough of a blow, I went into the nursery this morning and found out that something is wrong with Junior Qotemire. All the Aldebaran nurses had left in a panic and there was Junior Qotemire alone. He was very pale, sort of baby blue instead of medium blue, and listless. Dr. Qotemire is in a state. It seems that they're afraid Junior has copper-storage disease and they're running a bunch of tests. Something is depleting the copper in his blood, and he's very anemic. They have him in strict

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isolation and no Aldebaran is allowed near him because C-S disease is contagious as hell to them. It looks like Olga and I will have to stay with him around the clock. Dr. Qotemire just haunts the nursery. Everytime I looked up, there he was on the other side of the plexi window. Poor little Junior Qotemire—treated like a leper.

It's just as well that I have to work double shifts. It helps keep my mind off my other troubles. I found myself thinking seriously about this guy from Hyades IV yesterday. If you looked up their reproductive habits, Carmie, you know what that means—certain death.

Yours fatalistically,

Terra

Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Nov. 21

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Oh joy. Oh sweet, sweet joy! There is a *man* on the bull run. A human, real, homo-sape man. I thought I was hallucinating at first. I was in the nursery with Junior Qotemire when in walked this big beautiful *guy*.

"Well, hello," he said (I remember his every word), "I'm Dr. Brian-Scott. I'm going to be replacing Dr. Kelly-Bach."

It's too much to believe, Carmie. Dr. Kelly-Bach is actually retiring. Oh, bless Dr. Kelly-Bach.

Junior Qotemire isn't doing well, but I'm sure Dr. Brian-Scott will pull him through. I have a feeling that Dr. Brian-Scott can do anything he wants to.

Deliriously,

Terra

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Satellite Hospital Outpost
Taurus 14, North Horn 978675644
Nath Orbit

Nov. 22

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

It's all over for me. My heart aches and my liver throbs with grief. I am to be exiled.

Yes. It's true.

I don't know how to set this down. Tears keep blurring my eyes and my mind falters. Junior Qotemire is to be transferred and I have to go with him—he needs intensive nursing care. If he stays here he's sure to die; all his tests were positive for C-S disease. He's got plenty of copper stored in his liver, but not in his blood. The disease depleted an enzyme that he needs to make hemocyanin. Junior Qotemire is slowly suffocating. They're sending him to Hyades IV tomorrow, but they can't hope for a cure—just a sort of half-life on the oxygenator.

Dr. Qotemire asked for nurses to volunteer. That meant Olga and me. Well, Dr. Kelly-Bach just wouldn't hear of Olga going, so who did that leave?

I couldn't make up my mind right away. I was too shaken. I went into the nursery and looked at Junior Qotemire. I wanted to hate him. I nearly did, I think, but he reached out with his little pale snout and hissed softly against my hand. I picked him up then, and held him. I cried until I was dry, and all the while Junior Qotemire curled up in my arms and licked off the tears with his little pointed tongue.

Well I couldn't let him die, could I?

So I volunteered. I volunteered to leave beautiful Dr. Brian-Scott and to go and live among the Hyadean IVs. My mind is unhinged. Instead of Dr. Brian-Scott, I will have Junior Qotemire to comfort me—Junior Qotemire and the males of Hyades IV who have creases instead of noses and whose embrace is death.

My heart aches, Carmie. My spleen pulsates. Weep for me.

Yours in exile,

Terra

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Central Hive
Hyades IV 354657687 Hyades

Nov. 27

Carmelita O'Hare-Mbotu, RN
Teton Medical Center
Jackson Hole Summation City
Wyoming 306548760 United Earth, Sol

Dear Carmie,

Hyades IV is beautiful. I love it here.

But I do miss Junior Qotemire a little. He's still back on the bull run—and doing fine.

After I volunteered to go with Junior Qotemire, he improved. Really improved. His color perked up and his blood picture got better.

But it didn't last. The next morning he was sick as ever and due for transfer to Hyades IV that afternoon.

Dr. Brian-Scott was in a state. He was positive that we had overlooked something that could be important about C-S disease. He dialed printouts of the whole chart and just *pored* over them, while I stood there with stacks of DisPose-A-Pants and cut holes in them for Junior Qotemire's tail so I'd have a supply to take with us.

I was in a state too, as you might imagine. Outwardly I was calm, but inwardly I was a seething mass of raw emotion. Then, while I was snipping, Dr. Brian-Scott *hollered* at me. Well, Carmie, he startled me so that I slashed a pair of DisPose-A-Pants right in two.

"Did you put this note in the chart?" He stuck the printout under my nose and pointed.

I looked at it. It was a nurse's note about Junior Qotemire licking the tears off my face. Well, sitting there in cold print it really looked ridiculous. I had to admit it was my note. I could have died of embarrassment.

Dr. Brian-Scott looked long and hard at the chart and then at Junior Qotemire. Then he said to me, "Cry."

Well, Carmie, I was on the verge of tears anyway, and I just broke down and sobbed. I couldn't seem to stop.

Then he did the strangest thing. He stuck a test tube up to my face and collected the tears. I just didn't believe it. I was so astonished I stopped crying.

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He reached for another test tube and said, "Don't stop."

Did anyone ever tell you to keep on crying? It has a positively dehydrating effect. I couldn't squeeze out another tear.

Dr. Brian-Scott called dietary and ordered an *onion.* Stat. When it came, he sliced it with a scalpel from the circumcision kit and poked it in my face. Well, you talk about tears . . . And they weren't all from the onion either. By then I was mad. Who did he think he was anyway? Storming around sticking onions and test tubes in my face.

Then he held me by the shoulders and said, "Keep crying, Terra. It may be the only chance that little guy has."

He collected six test tubes. He sent one to the lab. Then he fed the other five to Junior Qotemire.

It was like a nightmare, Carmie. Here was the man-of-science feeding *my* tears to Junior Qotemire. It was like an old horror holo. . . . And pieces of onion all over the floor.

But it worked.

After a while, Junior Qotemire's color improved.

Dr. Brian-Scott says it was because of the mucin in my tears. Do you believe it? When Junior Qotemire digested the mucin, it broke down into the amino acids that he needed to synthesize his depleted enzyme. The lab made up buckets of amino acid soup for Junior Qotemire, so I won't have to take the onion shift any more.

Dr. Qotemire was delirious with joy. He insisted—absolutely *insisted,* that I go for R & R to Hyades IV.

And Carmie, he insisted that Dr. Brian-Scott go too!

When he got on the shuttle, Dr. Brian-Scott said to me (I remember his every word), "That was awfully unselfish of you to cry for Junior Qotemire."

You know what else he said, Carmie? He said, "I know that a girl like you, who could be so unselfish about Junior Qotemire, would give of herself in other ways too."

Imagine that, Carmie. *Imagine that.*

Unselfishly yours,

Terra

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ON SCIENCE FICTION DETECTIVE STORIES

by Jon L. Breen
art: Alex Schomburg

Mr. Breen is a full-time librarian in California and a part-time writer, best known for his mystery stories.

From their beginnings a close affinity has existed between science fiction and detective fiction. The relationship is most obvious in the number of writers who have been attracted to both fields. Edgar Allan Poe, who is hailed as the Father of the Detective Story for his three stories about C. Auguste Dupin, beginning with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), also contributed to science fiction with such stories as "The Unparalleled Adventures of Hans Pfaall" (1835). Arthur Conan Doyle, who created the most famous fictional detective in Sherlock Holmes, wrote several science fiction novels and stories about the memorable Professor Challenger, most notably *The Lost Word* (1912) and *The Poison Belt* (1913). And the early scientific detective stories of writers like Edwin Balmer and William MacHarg (*The Achievements of Luther Trant*, 1910) and Arthur B. Reeve (*The Silent Bullet*, 1912, and other volumes in the Craig Kennedy series) were on the border of mystery and science fiction.

More recent writers who have performed creditably in both fields are too numerous to mention, but among them are Fredric Brown, Anthony Boucher, Poul Anderson, Jack (John Holbrook) Vance, Henry Kuttner, Isaac Asimov, Harlan Ellison, Robert A. Heinlein (rumor hath it), John D. MacDonald, Edward D. Hoch, Evan Hunter (as Hunt Collins), Harry Stephen Keeler, Robert Bloch, Barry Malzberg, and Mack Reynolds. Edmund Crispin, a fine writer of formal detective fiction, has made a mark as a critic and anthologist of science fiction, while novelist Kingsley Amis has contributed to both fields as writer and commentator.

While the overlap of writers is great—and greater for example than the overlap, say, of Western writers with either field—there is reason to think that the overlap of readers is also considerable. Mystery fiction has not had an active "fandom" until recent years (excepting the always-busy Sherlockians), and it is doubtful mystery fans will ever become as highly organized, sociable, and vocal as science fiction fans. But there were enough mystery readers in the ranks of SF fans to start the first mystery amateur press al-

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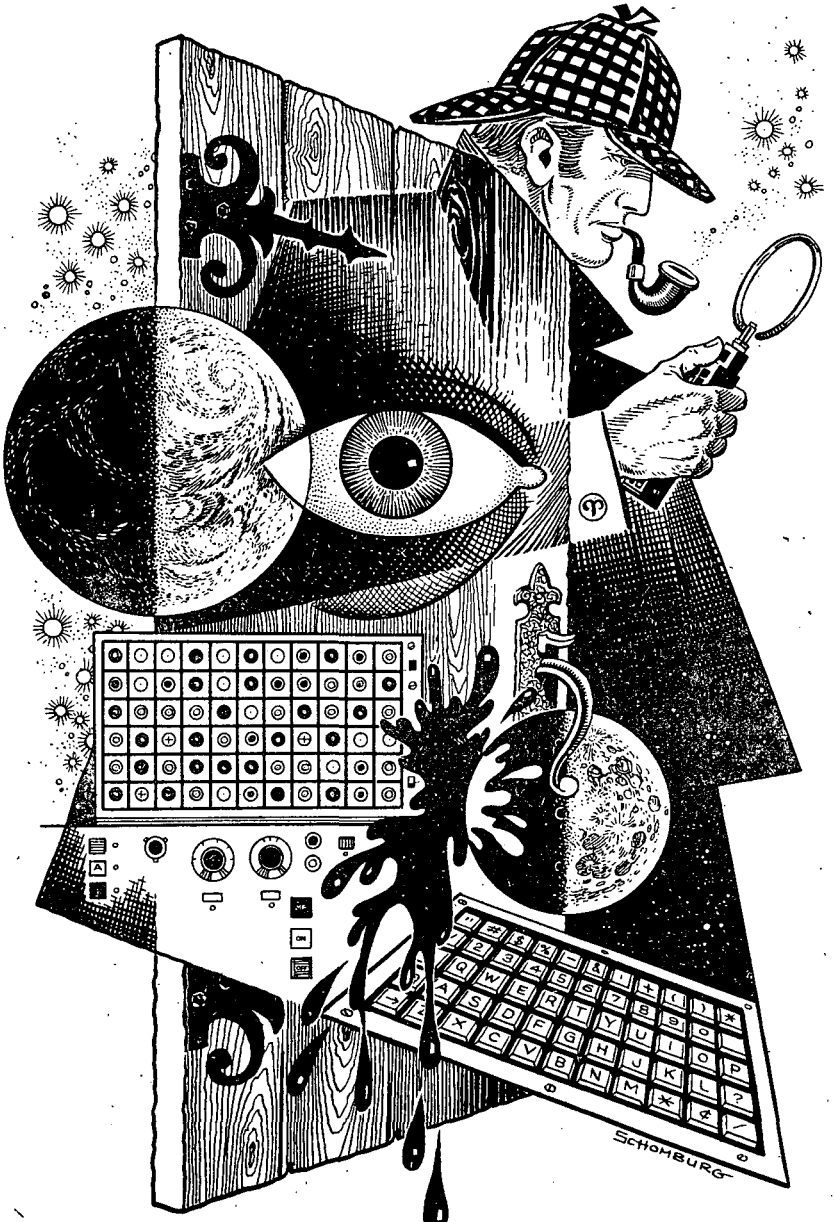

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liance, DAPA-EM, in 1974.[1]

Why do detective and science fiction so often attract the same writers and readers? In their most basic forms, they both concern problem-solving and appeal to the reader's intellect in a way that Westerns, adventure stories, and pure romances do not. Such classic tales as Stanley G. Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" (1934) and Murray Leinster's "First Contact" (1945) are not detective stories in the usual sense, but the reasoning from observed data that moves their plots produces approximately the same kind of intellectual appeal as a closely-reasoned deductive puzzle. James P. Hogan's *Inherit the Stars* (1977) is a recent example of a science fiction novel that, though lacking a crime or suspects, is structured exactly like a formal detective story, has the purely mental appeal (with characterization taking a decided back seat) of a timetable puzzle by Freeman Wills Crofts, and, indeed, gives the scientifically-minded reader a fair chance to solve the mystery of the 50,000-years-dead corpse in a spacesuit. Throughout the book, theories are advanced, considered and rejected, until the true solution clicks into place, affording the reader the same satisfaction as an Ellery Queen summation.

With so many writers working in both fields, it is not surprising that many have tried working in both at the same time. What *is* surprising is that for many years it was felt that the pure detective story and the science fiction story could not be successfully combined.

John W. Campbell, Jr., who tried something of the kind in "Who Goes There?" (1938, as Don L. Stuart), much better SF than detection, wrote in his introduction to the collection of that title:

> You see, in science-fiction, the ordinary detective story is impossible; it can't be fair to the reader because of the very freedom of science-fiction that allows the author to invent new devices, even new cultural patterns, during the course of the story. . . .Now, in science-fiction, the murder in the locked room may have been committed by entering the room via time-machine before it was locked, or after the corpse was found. Or the murderer may have invented invisibility, or a fourth-dimensional snickersnee that can reach into a three-dimensional room and do its work.[2]

But the use of a *deus ex machina* makes for poor fiction, whether in a mystery or an SF or a mainstream story. The sci-

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ence fiction writer has no more right to pull a "fourth-dimensional snickersnee" out of the air than does any other fiction writer—such a device must somehow be foreshadowed, prepared for, just as the solution of a fair-play detective story must be prepared for in the way of clues. Creating a science-fictional setting is a tremendous challenge at any time—how do you do it without boring the reader and stopping the story cold on the one hand, or skimping on details and leaving unanswered questions on the other? Once a writer can perform this feat, throwing a few mystery clues into the pot should not be that difficult to do, though admittedly creating a fair-play mystery plot is no cinch either.

Of course, it was Isaac Asimov who knocked Campbell's incompatibility theory out of the box with his two robot mystery novels, *The Caves of Steel* (1954) and *The Naked Sun* (1957), which are both full-fledged science fiction novels, full of interesting ideas and extrapolations, and full-fledged classical detective stories with intricate construction worthy of Queen, Christie, and Carr. Mystery writers, argued Asimov, had the potential of being just as unfair to the reader as science fiction mystery writers, and SF mystery writers could, with proper explanations given for all unusual future or parallel world phenomena, be just as fair to the reader. "The fictional detective," writes Asimov, "can make use only of facts known to the reader *in the present* or of 'facts' of the fictional future, which will be carefully explained beforehand."[3]

The psychological impossibility of Earth people going outside in *The Caves of Steel,* the horror of Solarians at the very thought of being in the same room with another human being in *The Naked Sun*, and the famous Three Laws of Robotics in both books all have an important bearing on the solutions to the puzzles. But long before the denouement, the reader knows as much about these factors as the books' detectives, Lije Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw.

Many of Asimov's other SF novels have strong detective interest. The Lucky Starr juveniles, originally published under the pseudonym Paul French, offer rewarding fair-play mystery plots, and *Second Foundation* (1953), third volume in the "Foundation" trilogy, offers a "where-dun-it" problem with multiple solutions.

Though Asimov is the most notable combiner of SF and formal detection, several other writers have managed to merge the forms successfully. Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy series, most notably *Too Many Magicians* (1967) and more recently "The Bitter End" (IASFM, September-October 1978), involve locked room and im-

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possible crime problems à la John Dickson Carr. Garrett solves the "snickersnee" problem in a unique way—though Darcy operates in an alternate universe in which magic works (and is used in place of such mystery-oriented sciences as ballistics and forensic medicine), the mysteries are generally given non-magical solutions. (When, oh when, will the Darcy short stories and novelettes be collected in book form?) [Some already are, in Ace Books' *Murder and Magic,* by Randall Garrett. —Ed.]

Edward D. Hoch, in his Computer Cops series, uses the expectations of the science fiction reader as ingenious misdirections for his detective plots, particularly in *The Transvection Machine* (1971) and *The Frankenstein Factory* (1975). The latter novel, with its mysterious series of deaths on isolated Horseshoe Island, pays homage to the classic of isolated house party whodunits, Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939).

Other recent examples include the three fine novelettes in Larry Niven's *The Long Arm of Gil Hamilton* (1976), which also includes a brief essay on SF detection; Andrew J. Offutt's "The Greenhouse Defect" (in *Stellar Short Novels,* 1976), a locked room problem for detective Amos McKendree; John Varley's "The Barbie Murders" (IASFM, January-Feburary 1978), whose identical cast of suspects cause unique problems for detective Anna-Louise Bach; Jonathan Fast's *Mortal Gods* (1978), most notable for its incredible victims, genetically engineered demigods called "Lifestylers;" C. L. Grant's "View—with a Difference" (in *Dark Sins, Dark Dreams,* 1978), an outer space send-up of Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin; and Ron Goulart's "Shinbet Investigates" (in *Weird Heroes*, volume 6, 1977), a fair (if wacky) puzzle set in the Barnum system.

As one might imagine, the mysteries in an SF detective story are often on a grander scale than those in a mundane detective tale. In Lin Carter's *The Purloined Planet* (1969), a rewarding story for the reader who can brave the unrelievedly facetious narrative, licensed Master Criminal Hautley Quicksilver solves an impossible crime of record proportions: the disappearance of an entire planet. Poul Anderson's space travellers in *After Doomsday* (1962) have to solve the murder of the whole human race.

The crime-mystery-suspense story has many variants and all are amenable to SF equivalents. Many writers have done hard-boiled private eye stories in SF settings, usually for comic effect as in William F. Nolan's *Space for Hire* (1971), about interplanetary shamus Sam Space. Asimov's four stories about Dr. Wendell

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Urth (included in *Asimov's Mysteries,* 1968) are cloistered-detective stories in the manner of Poe's Dupin and Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner. Anne McCaffrey's "Apple" (1969) is a sort of parapsychic police procedural. Ben Bova's *The Multiple Man* (1976) is a near-future political thriller. The fictionalized solution of a real-life crime appears in Harlan Ellison's Jack the Ripper speculation, "The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World" (1967), a sequel to Robert Bloch's "A Toy for Juliette" (1967), which concerns Jack operating in the future. Countless science fiction stories concern crime in some form, and many could as easily be called "novels of suspense" were it not for their speculative content.

Though Sherlock Holmes' creator had strong credentials as an SF writer, he never gave his Baker Street detective a science-fictional adventure. With the large number of SF writers who have evinced strong Sherlockian interests—A. E. van Vogt, Poul Anderson, Fritz Leiber, and Philip José Farmer to name a few—it is not surprising that others have done it for him. Manly Wade Wellman and Wade Wellman, for example, wrote a dual pastiche of Doyle and H. G. Wells in *Sherlock Holmes' War of the Worlds* (1975), an extravaganza in which Prof. Challenger also participates. Mack Reynolds presents an aged Holmes in the very funny story, "The Adventure of the Extraterrestrial" (1965). Reynolds also collaborated with August Derleth on two SF cases for Derleth's Holmes-substitute, Solar Pons—"The Adventure of the Snitch in Time" (1953) and "The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus" (1955).

Probably the first writer to put a series character of his own, created for mundane mysteries, into a science-fictional situation was Anthony Boucher, whose Fergus O'Breen encounters time travel mysteries in "Elsewhen" (1943), "The Pink Caterpillar" (1945), and "The Chronokinesis of Jonathan Hull" (1946). Boucher (as H. H. Holmes) depicted the world of SF writers and fans in the famous non-SF mystery novel *Rocket to the Morgue* (1942).

My own few attempts at science fictional detective stories illustrate, I think, both the possibilities and the problems of cultivating this particular literary hybrid. The first was inspired by my enthusiasm for Agatha Christie's detective stories and a desire to carry the old question of "who done it?" one step beyond.

Though the question of the killer's identity is often not one of the main factors in the plot of a crime story today, for many classical writers, fooling the reader on this point was a principal as-

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pect of the game. When the "least-suspected-person" began to stand out like a sore thumb, many writers, notably Christie, went to extremes to conceal the criminal's true face, pinning the crime on such characters as the policeman investigating the case, the beautiful young ingenue, the precocious child, the narrator-Watson, the supposed great detective himself, an apparent victim, everybody working in concert, nobody at all (making the crime an accident, the most disappointing possible surprise windup), that old stand-by, the wheelchair-ridden invalid, and so on. Eventually all these solutions were used up, though of course it is possible to ring innumerable changes on them. But the science fiction writer can carry the whodunit one step further and pin the crime on murderers that were simply not available to Agatha Christie (and I don't mean Martians). See, for example, John Varley's "The Phantom of Kansas" (1976).

In my Christie pastiche, "Hercule Poirot in the Year 2010" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* March 1975), it is made possible legitimately to follow the perfectly innocent thoughts of a character who in the end proves to be the murderer. Though a certain amount of extrapolative window-dressing is introduced (passengers take shopping trips from London to New York via the underground; bikinis on the beach are considered quaintly modest; the Common Market has become the United States of Europe), the main SF idea is the use of mind-readers and omnipresent thought-recording devices that make normal detective work obsolete. When it appears a killer has beaten the mind detectors, via the illegitimate use of a psychiatric technique called Thought Therapy, the 150-year-old Poirot, kept alive and vital by a combination of transplants and artificial parts, is called in. The clue that reveals the murderer is a simple psychological concept that requires no elaborate preparation or exposition. Thus, the story, though unequivocally science fictional in its primary plot device, needs a minimum of backgrounding to make its solution fair.

One great pitfall of SF writing is, of course, having events catch up with you—for example, the reference to Nixon International Airport in one of Edward D. Hoch's Computer Cops stories—and not long after my story appeared in print, the last Poirot novel, *Curtain* (1975), appeared. In that book, Poirot dies, long before 2010, rendering my tale obsolete (barring the tempting possibilities of cryogenics and cloning.)

Almost from the beginning of Isaac Asimov's Black Widowers

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series in *EQMM,* I carried around in my head the idea of my second SF detective story. Though some of the Black Widowers stories have had enough SF interest to see publication in SF magazines, all of them have been straight mysteries. I thought that confronting the Black Widowers with a problem that involved the Three Laws of Robotics was a good idea for a double-barreled parody of Asimov as both SF writer and mystery writer. The story's finishing twist, which of course I will not reveal here, I also had in mind from the beginning.

This being a parody, the intent being more-or-less humorous imitation rather than more-or-less straightfaced imitation as in the Poirot story, I renamed the problem-solving group and called the tale "An Evening with the White Divorcees" (EQMM, May 1976). The group's guest for the evening is a United States Robot Development Corporation official named Calvin Sousa. Though reluctant after listening to the "cutesy table talk" of his dining companions, including one member's rendering of the first three books of the Old Testament in clerihews, to present his problem, Sousa finally reveals his concern: a robot has apparently, impossibly, committed murder, and this blatant violation of the First Law threatens the whole future of the robot business. It will surprise no one that it is Harry the waiter who finally comes up with the answer.

The problem is basically a locked room murder, and the solution is a somewhat facetious one, appropriate to a parody. Again, although the Three Laws and the development of robots is necessary to the plot, making the story unquestionably science fiction, the actual solution to the problem involves no hardware out of left field and thus can be fairly anticipated by the sharp-eyed reader, provided he or she is in as silly a mood as the author.

A third story, more fantasy than science fiction, offers similar challenges. "The Flying Thief of Oz" *EQMM,* April 1976), written at the long-standing request of Ellery Queen (Frederic Dannay), is a pastiche of L. Frank Baum's famous children's books in which the Wizard of Oz acts as detective. Here too there is a locked room problem of sorts: how did the jewels disappear from the locked treasure house in the Emerald City? Oz, of course, like every fantasy kingdom, has its own rules, and the fantastic solution is based on these rules, making the question of fair play to the reader more difficult. Only a reader steeped in the Oz books could solve the locked room problem and pick up the one clue to the thief's identity. Though the story can stand on its own as a fan-

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tasy, it cannot as a detective story. It is comparable to a science fiction story that is only intelligible to a reader who knows about SF concepts explained in other stories. Thus, it represents a kind of inbreeding that fantasy and science fiction (and detective fiction, for that matter) have to guard against.

I have cited only a few of the many novels and stories in which detection and SF have been successfully combined. With the dividing lines between *genres* breaking down, and with best-selling writers like Ira Levin and Michael Crichton regularly taking elements from both fields for their novels, there will undoubtedly be more such hybrids in the future. But there is one kind of mystery-SF hybrid that I as a reader am uncomfortable with: the story which starts as an apparently mundane mystery but comes up with a science fictional solution. It is very difficult not to leave the reader feeling cheated in such a process.

Victor Canning's *The Finger of Saturn* (1974) manages the trick with a degree of success, but here at least there is a hint in the title. Robert Lee Hall's *Exit Sherlock Holmes* (1977), a one-of-a-kind *tour de force*, also gets away with it. But George C. Chesbro's well-written and very promising *The Shadow of a Broken Man* (1977), the first book-length case of dwarf-detective Mongo Frederickson, sacrifices credibility in its resort to an SF solution.

Generally, a science fiction mystery should declare itself from the beginning. If you know you're reading a science fiction novel, a time travel solution to the locked room will not antagonize you. But if you came upon one in one of John Dickson Carr's Dr. Fell novels, you would be justifiably outraged. With the passing years, there is less and less emphasis on the rules of the game in *genre* fiction, generally to its benefit. But in the pure detective story, still a viable form, the most basic of these rules, involving fairness to the reader, continues to apply.

NOTES

[1]Information about this admirable (and still unique) organization-publication can be had from its current editor, Art Scott, 10365 Wunderlich Dr., Cupertino, CA 95014.

[2]John W. Campbell, Jr., *Who Goes There?* (Shasta, 1948), p. 6.

[3]Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Mysteries* (Fawcett, 1977; reprint of 1968 Doubleday edition), p. 12.

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

A lot of con(vention)s in the next couple of months—as many as five in a single weekend. Make your plans now. If you can't reach a con, call me at (301) 794-7718. If my machine answers, leave your number—I'll call back. When calling, show good fannish manners—give your name, and say why you're calling. When writing, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). For a longer, later list of cons (and a sample of SF folksongs), send me an SASE at 10015 Greenbelt Road #101, Seabrook MD 20801. If you're planning a con, let me know—there's no charge for being listed. Look for me at cons behind the iridescent "Filthy Pierre" name badge.

Kubla Khan. For info, write: **647 Devon Dr., Nashville TN 37220.** Or phone: **(615) 832-8402** (10 AM to 10 PM, not collect). Con will be held in: Nashville TN (if city and/or state omitted, same as in address) on: 18–20 May, 1979. Guests will include: Frank Robinson & A. J. Offut. As at many Southern cons, action centers on the 'round-the-clock party room.

V-Con, (604) 263-9969. Vancouver, BC, Canada, 25–27 May. Jack Vance and Frank Herbert.

Penulticon, (303) 433-9774. Denver CO, 25–28 May. C. J. Cherryh and Samuel (Chip) Delany.

ByobCon, (816) 753-2420. Kansas City MO, 25–27 May. Karl Edward Wagner & Andrew J. Offut.

JustImagiCon, (901) 365-2132. Memphis TN, 25–27 May. L. S. de Camp & Theodore Sturgeon. A heavy program, as Southern cons go. And now, the Eastern anchor of this 5-con weekend:

DisClave, (301) 439-2952. Washington DC, 25–28 May. Roger Zelazny. It's always run through Monday—now they admit it. A party room tradition: cookies brought by members—like you.

Artkane, (717) 233-3943. Harrisburg PA, 8–10 June. Honoring the fantasy and SF artists.

WhatCon, (217) 332-5018. Urbana IL, 8–10 June. Gordon R. Dickson, and Bob & Ann Passavoy.

Beta Draconis, (416) 828-6949. Toronto, Canada, 15–17 June. Guest of Honor: Frederik Pohl.

MidWestCon, c/o Tabakow, 3953 St. Johns Terr., Cincinnati OH 45236. 22–24 June. Where the old-time Midwest fans meet to talk about how it was 20 or 30 years ago. Very low-keyed.

WesterCon, 195 Alhambra #9, San Francisco CA 94123. 4–8 July. Richard Lupoff & Bruce Pelz. The big Western con. The masquerade usually brings out spectacular costumes.

X-Con, 1743 N. Cambridge #301, Milwaukee WI 53211. (414) 961-2212. 6–8 July. Ben Bova & Doug Price.

UniCon, Box 263, College Park MD 20740. (301) 794-7374. Washington DC, 13–15 July.

Darkover Council, Box 355, New York NY 11219. (516) 781-6795. 13–15 July. M. Z. Bradley.

Archon, Box 15852, St. Louis MO 63114. (314) 428-7939. 13–15 July. Joe Haldeman.

DeepSouthCon, 1903 Dante, New Orleans LA 70118. (504) 861-2602. 20–22 July. R. A. Lafferty.

SeaCon, Box 428, Latham NY 12110. (518) 783-7673. Brighton (near London) England, 23–27 Aug. The World SF Convention for 1979. Book now, before the hotels & cheap flights fill.

NorthAmeriCon, Box 58009, Louisville KY 40258. (502) 636-5340. 30 Aug.–3 Sept., 1979. Fred Pohl, Lester Del Rey and our own George Scithers. The continental con, while the WorldCon is abroad. Everything the WorldCon has but the Hugos–plus a moonlight river cruise.

NorEasCon II, Box 46, MIT PO, Boston MA 02139. 29 Aug.–1 Sept., 1980. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm and Bruce Pelz. The World SF Convention for 1980, back in Boston after 9 years.

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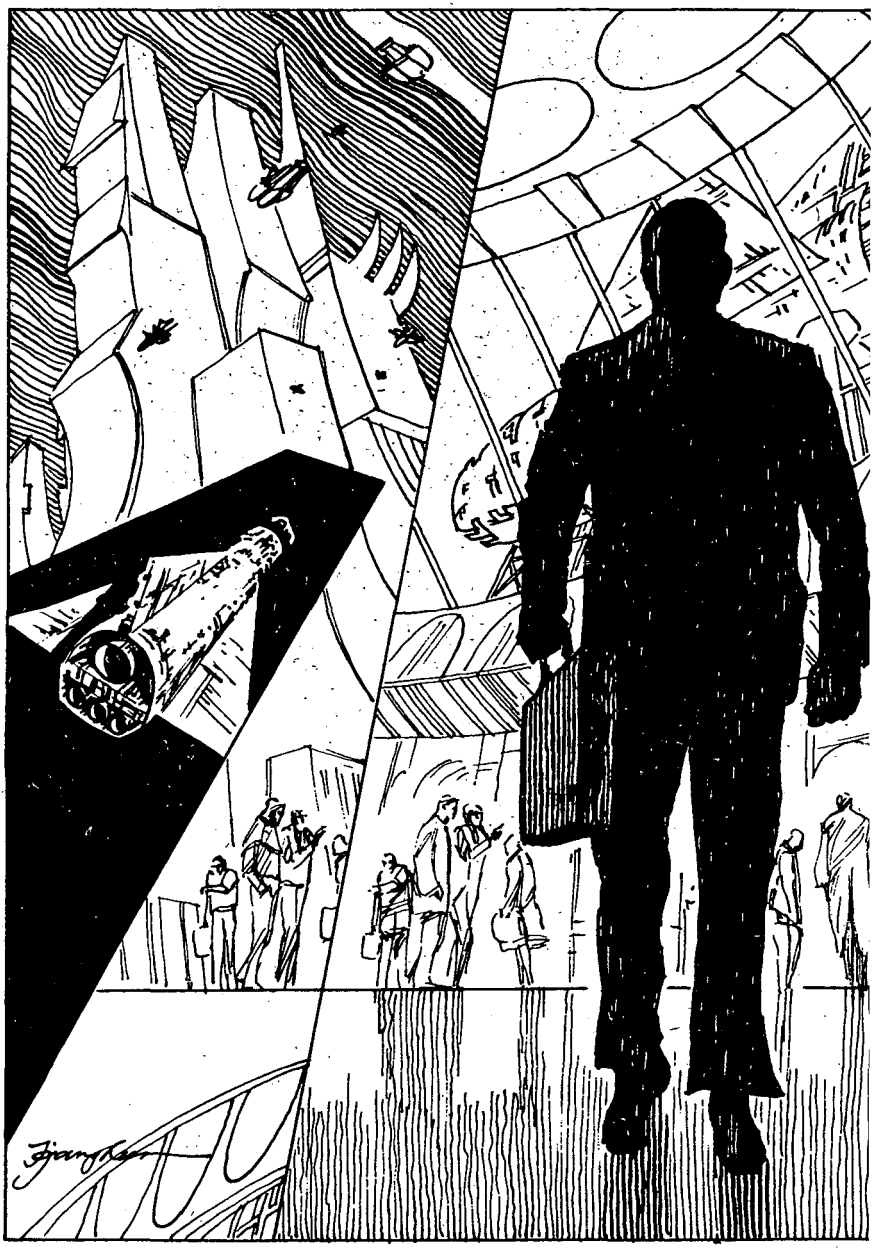

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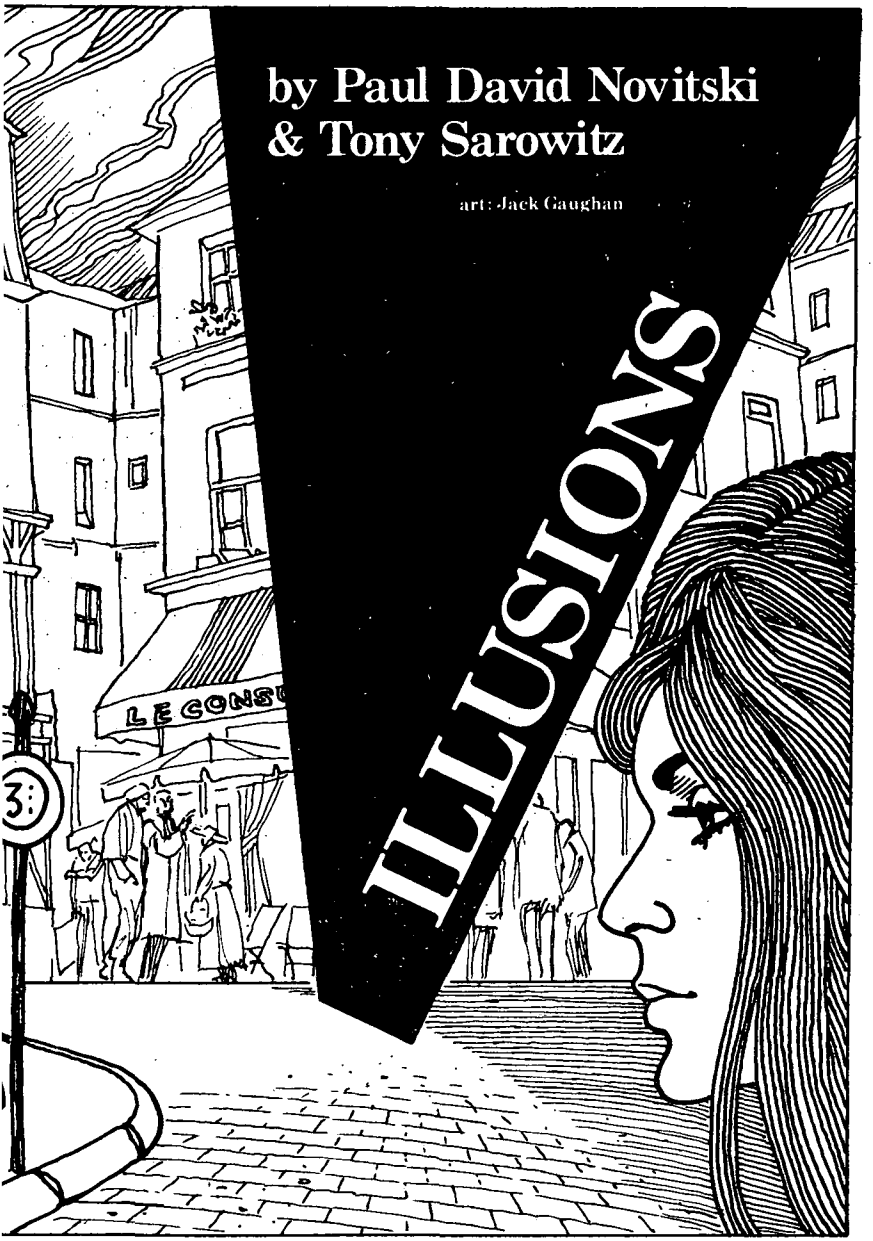

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Paul Novitski is 28, an inveterate Northwest resident, and the current editor of the SFWA Forum. *This year he is laboring as a secretary in an advertising agency, and in his free time writes SF and propagates an uncommon species of nettle.*

Tony Sarowitz is now writing fulltime when he's not mowing the lawn, weeding the lawn, planting flowers in the beds alongside the lawn. . . He grew up in the middle of downtown Philadelphia and always envied his suburban friends and their plush, green yards. Now, he reports, he has 4,000 square feet of the stuff and not enough time to lie down on it and rest.

The worst of it was having to wake twice each morning. At least, that's what Zena told herself. (The sheets were cooling: Walter must already have been up.) She knew that it wasn't the truth, of course. She needed this delay between her real awakening and the mock one to get into her role, to remember just who and where she was supposed to be. And when. But it helped to have something to point to as the source of all her irritation and anger, so that she wouldn't have to think about her frustration again until later, when she could take the time.

"It's eight-thirty," said the voice in her ear. "You're on."

"Okay," she subvocalized.

"Get moving," said the voice.

"I'm working! Get out of my head." They should have known better than that. Unless it was Glaize. . . . She felt a tremor of anxiety and forced herself to relax. If it had been Glaize, he would understand her touchiness.

She actually was dawdling. It was becoming harder each day to slip into the role when it ought to have been getting easier. She ran through the steps of the Serky method, clearing her mind, adding bits of information to the blank canvas of thought. The year was two thousand and six. No, three, damn it, two thousand and three. The date was May the fifteenth. Her name was Judith Sykora; her occupation, secretary. For the past three weeks she

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had been lovers with Walter Arthur Datney, a business tycoon who had been cryonically frozen in nineteen sixty-nine and revived just six months before. She loved Walter fiercely (but it was so damned hard to play a role opposite someone who wasn't playing, who believed it was all real. And it wasn't fair to him—).

No! Out of character. Was she an amateur that she couldn't keep her mind on her role? She made herself start again from the beginning. Two thousand and three. May the fifteenth. Judith Sykora . . . She had to run through the process three times more before she got it right, got every detail, and felt herself slip completely into the part. If the tap implanted next to her hypothalmus were turned on now, it would be transmitting the persona of Judith to Glaize's recorders.

Zena still didn't move. Her character was perfect—she was sure of that—but the immediate situation was still hazy. She concentrated with that peculiar awareness of an actor: in character, yet knowing that there was a stage and an audience. It was just past eight-thirty. That left forty-five minutes till the spaceport scene, two hours till Paris. By now they might have taken down Forty-Second Street to make room for the Champs Élysées. Walter would be leaving the apartment soon. He was not in bed so he was probably dressing, perhaps eating breakfast in the kitchen. She listened for clues, trying to distinguish between foreground sounds and the hubbub rising from the street. Somewhere nearby, a sidewalk band played the Brandenburg Concertos with raucous electronic instruments. Airbikes whooshed past the window, and she heard the occasional whirr of a police helipac. She visualized the apartment with its chairs, sofa, cushioned floor, all the inconveniences of Glaize's campy version of the early twenty-first century. There, that sounded like a plastic zipper closing.

She really was stalling now. She yawned, stretched, and opened her eyes, letting the bed covers fall to her waist as she sat.

Walter was by the window pulling on his shirt, staring out onto Lexington Avenue. In spite of his receding hairline and his coarse, wrinkling flesh—people deteriorated so quickly in the 1900s!—he was still a handsome man by Judith's standards. He didn't seem nearly so gaunt as his early pictures; ever since the doctors had thawed him out and cured his cancer, Walter had been gaining weight steadily. He glanced at her, smiled wanly, then looked back out at the street. "Late sleeper," he said. "I thought I'd have to leave a note." There was a hint of melancholy

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in his voice.

"You're going somewhere?" Just the right note of sleepy concern.

"Paris," he said. "I told you last night. I have to oversee that Euro-Slavic merger. Be leaving in a few minutes." He ran his thumb down the front of his shirt and a ribbon of brilliant red appeared. He studied himself briefly in the mirrored wall, then tugged on the hem. The red stripe disappeared. "Styles." He shook his head with bemusement, looked back out of the window. He was sad, she was sure of it.

She got out of bed and walked across the spongy floor to stand at his side. She smiled. "You're a beauty, you know." She plucked at the yoke of his shirt until it was centered on his shoulders.

For a moment he grinned back with that air of unassailable self-assurance she had become accustomed to the past three weeks, but the grin faded and his broad face settled into cheerless lines.

"What's the matter, Walter?" She followed his gaze out the window to the spires of the ancient New York skyline.

"It's hard to believe," he murmured, "how much everything has changed."

She nearly laughed aloud, coughed instead. Two thousand and three so different from the 1960s? If only he knew how much the world had really changed in the centuries he'd been dead! Some corner of her mind yelled at her to get back into the role, to suppress this manic humor for just ten minutes until Walter was out of the room and in the hands of the rest of the cast. She struggled to keep her expression somber.

Then, quickly, as slippery as oil, her mood changed from mirth to anger. How could he allow himself to be so fooled? Why didn't he realize? Why was he putting her in such a spot?

"—something?" Walter was staring at her with obvious concern.

It was over. She felt empty. She searched mechanically for the proper thing to say, all links to her role shattered for the moment. "You're leaving." Very weak.

But it seemed to satisfy. He smiled, slid his hand down her cheek, down the dark skin of her neck, her collarbone, to press gently against her breast. "I'll only be gone four days."

She nodded, pouted her lips, then began to return his smile.

"Eight forty-five," said the voice in her ear. She clung to the sound of it. Only a few more minutes.

Walter took a step back and looked at her. He seemed about to

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speak but stopped himself, walked hesitantly to the door. "I have to catch a cab." In the doorway he turned, bit his lip. "Judith. . . ?" For an instant, an expression of mixed pain and fear made him wince, and was gone. "Do you love me?"

All she could do was nod, smile her practiced smile, force herself to bring her fingers to her lips and blow him a kiss.

He played at catching it, stepped outside, and closed the door.

Zena stood by the window for nearly three minutes, waiting for something but not remembering what. Below, on the street, Walter appeared and flagged down a taxi. Then a voice in her ear gave the all clear.

She slumped against the window frame and closed her eyes, running through the Serky centering phrases to try to put herself back in kilter. It was only partially successful. *Do you love me?* He had never asked such a question before. Why would he say that unless he was becoming insecure? What if this world created for him by Glaize and the cast—especially herself—were not working, were not convincing enough? She shivered.

But it was not her worry, not now, not until after Paris. She had four full days of bit parts and easy living, she was free, the weight had been taken from her. She smiled and whirled in the middle of the floor, feeling completely herself again at last.

"Room change," she subvocalized. The strange, hard-edged furniture of two thousand and three sank like melting ice cream into the floor, and slowly the muralled walls and soft-sculpted arrangement of her own modern apartment took shape. This was Glaize's only concession to the present. When it was complete, she dressed and sat in front of a rear-lit mirror to remove her make-up.

For the duration of her role in Walter's life, she would live on the set, as did all of the actors in the troupe. Glaize wanted them to . . . how had he put it . . . to *marinate* in the world of two thousand and three, to insure the consistency of their responses not only to Walter but also to their future audiences. The hypothalmic taps picked up sensations and the grosser emotions, an actor's psychological skin, so that while the actors didn't have to be hypnotized to believe in their roles completely, they needed at least to establish solid foundations of pretense. That was where Andreyev Serky's method of persona construction became so useful to the troupe. Small slips of character (Zena winced as she thought back on the last scene) could be edited out later, but the basic personality was too complex to be synthesized. That was the

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actor's responsibility. Zena had gone to experience several of Glaize's productions before she had joined his troupe, and not once had she caught a false note. Glaize demanded perfection from his casts.

She sprayed solvent on her cheeks and peeled away the two thin strips of plastic that had sharpened the lines of her face. Her skin was pale underneath. She hesitated, staring at her image. The pink streaks below her eyes were the only visible traces of her natural features.

She thought of the half-hysterical reaction she had had to Walter less than ten minutes before. That had been coming for a long time, but she had not expected it to erupt so soon. It was the strain of having to have been in character nearly all day every day for the past three weeks. His secretary by day, his companion every evening, and his lover at night. Well, she thought, smearing the brown pigment from her cheeks, she had better get used to it. They had made her up approximately to resemble his long-dead wife in order to ease his rebirth into the future, and he would need that crutch for some time to come.

Zena had been incredibly lucky to have been given this part. Glaize rarely used actors outside his own troupe, rarely brought in new blood. No, not lucky. She refused to play at being humble: the critics had not been lying when they had raved about her performances in last season's sensies. She had a talent for summoning strong currents of touch, taste, sight, and smell for the sensie recorders, and Glaize obviously thought she would make a good emoter in his Experiences. But when the government had commissioned Glaize to provide Walter Datney with an environment close enough to his own to keep him sane, Zena had auditioned totally unsuspecting that she would come away with the female lead.

She grimaced, sprayed more solvent on her face, and picked the putty off the tip of her nose. There was no avoiding it. The whole situation bothered her. Government commission or no commission, Glaize was taking advantage of Walter's plight, he was capitalizing on it. It simply didn't seem fair that Walter should be the dupe for the rest of his life. Zena understood the necessity, of course: all of the previous revivals of twentieth century cryos had gone hopelessly insane or had suicided when the enormity of their isolation from their time of birth sank in. No amount of therapy, no gentle breaking of the news had helped to ameliorate those inevitable tragedies. Though the technicians

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could not hope to reproduce twentieth century Earth closely enough to fool Walter, they did believe they could construct a credible twenty-first, in the hopes that enough things would remain enough the same to provide Walter with a psychological bridge across his death.

She shook her head, and the face in the mirror shook back at her. She had to get out of the apartment. There would be plenty of time to finish her make-up at the spaceport before Walter's next scene.

All right. She stood, feeling tired, feeling a little shaky, and left the apartment. Took the ag tube down, not the clunky old hydraulic lift. Down on the street, extras and stage hands were walking and running in every direction, preparing for scenes to come. Off to one side she caught a glimpse of Walter's cab seeming to dance as it crept down the pavement, holographs playing against the opaqued windows.

Zena walked two blocks and entered an alley cluttered with split sacks of garbage, an old tire, the suggestion of a bum lying beneath a pile of newspapers. Fifteen feet into the alley she walked through the holographic field—

—and stepped into the noise and glare of the Kennedy International Spaceport. The stage crew was still raising the holographic flats: she saw the Empire State Building flicker in the distance and go out. Then the holo in her line of sight turned on and she was looking down one of the long Spaceport corridors, alive with people. Although the cast had not yet assembled, a thousand mirages clamored in a dozen languages; arrivals and departures were announced by a laconic, genderless voice. Twi must have been testing the sound. Zena walked across the real part of the floor to the dressing room (marked "Women") to change.

Inside, about fifteen or twenty actors, nearly half the total cast, milled in front of the long mirrors, shaping their features with putty, spraying on skin, tinting eyes and voices and hair. Their babble stopped as she entered the room, and began again slowly. Zena saw glances exchanged, eyebrows raised. She stepped quickly to an empty stool and set to work on her face. Damn it, if that was the way they wanted to be. . . . She sprayed her face with solvent and peeled off the remains of her high cheekbones, the extra thickness along the bridge of her nose. Her own light skin appeared beneath the mask.

She glanced up in the mirror to find Orr standing behind her,

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staring back. He smiled. "How do, Zena?"

She shrugged, feeling warm and good that he was there. Orr was the only member of the troupe that she had managed to befriend. "Zingo. Du?"

"Hey, cut the crap, you two," said the woman sitting to Zena's left. What was her name . . . Henda? "Stay in tempo!"

Orr made a face in the mirror. "You watch yourself, Henda. *Tempo*'s anachronistic the way you just used it." He leaned toward the mirror to adjust an eyebrow. "Fine, I guess," he answered Zena, "if you like doing bit part after bit part." He glanced down, grinned crookedly. "Which I do."

Zena puffed out her cheeks and sighed at her reflection. "At least walk-ons are your forte, Orr. It takes me too long to get psyched-up for a role."

Someone across the crowded dressing room snickered, but it might have been at something else. Orr said, "Who are you today?"

She stood and stripped off her vinyl jumpsuit. "All I've got is a walk-on part in the crowd scene coming up. While Walter's in Paris I've got a couple of bit parts, nothing special." She flipped through the costumes hanging on the rack until she found one with her name: a fluorescent green tunic with a triangular window for her navel. A curly blue wig hung with it. "*God*. Did people really wear these things?"

"While Walter-poo's in Paris," mimicked an actor on the other side of the rack, "I've got a couple itsy-bitsy parts, nothing *spec*ial." The others laughed.

Zena parted costumes and stuck her head through to the other side, but she couldn't figure out who had said it. "Okay," she asked the bunch of them, "so what's the problem? You don't like the casting? Complain to Glaize. But get off my back!" She pulled the tunic over her head and sat back down to put on her face. Orr was on the stool beside her, now.

"You're edgy," he said. "Why don't you get some rest?"

"I'm fine!" she said, then, "shit!" as her hand slipped, smearing putty across her cheek. She rubbed it off angrily and began again.

"No, I'm serious," said Orr. "You've got a rough schedule, working day and night." Again, that snicker from across the dressing room. Orr touched her shoulder. "Maybe you should take the week off. Talk to Glaize. We can absorb your bit parts with no problem."

Zena clenched her jaw. She couldn't afford to let Glaize think

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she couldn't take the pressure, but she couldn't say that to Orr—not here, not now. She leaned close to the glass to line her eyes, sat back to scrutinize her work. "Thanks for the concern," she said, giving him a brief smile. "These next four days will be plenty of time to relax. The bit parts will do me good." She pulled on the blue wig, grimaced, and got up to leave.

"Break a leg, sweetie," said someone behind her.

Zena pushed roughly through the door, nearly dislocating the face of a surprised actor on the other side, and walked across the set. The Spaceport was complete: a vast dome, brightly lit, one entire quadrant a window through which she could see the launching pads outside. If she remembered correctly, that particular view was being projected on the back of the Lexington Avenue set. Rocketships rose on flame and slowly fell in roiling clouds of steam. She had to smile, in spite of her anger. When Glaize designed backdrops, he went all the way.

Twi's soundtrack was turned off, but hundreds of pre-recorded extras milled about in the middle distance. A stage hand walked into one of the holos, testing the synch, and his recorded image continued into the distance as he vanished behind the field. Perfect.

"Zena, blocking," she subvocalized, and in her ear the stage manager's voice directed her to her opening position. She tried to figure out the boundaries of the real space but the holos were faultless, the seams invisible. Glaize was economical; his sets were never very much larger than they had to be. She assumed that the stage took in the taxi stand outside, the Spaceport entrance, the ticket counter, the exit to the launching pad, and probably the men's room and concessions, with all of the floorspace between. The spaceport dome, of course, was holographic as well, as were all of the walls above five or ten meters. The cameras could have been anywhere. The ticket counter—a long, bulky, wood-grained plastic affair that physically separated the passengers from flesh-and-blood ticket agents—was a clashing archaism, probably outmoded even by two thousand and three, but Glaize's sets occasionally incorporated such anachronisms simply to give Walter an anchor.

"Nine thirteen," said the voice in her ear. "Places, everybody. One minute thirty-seven seconds to Datney's entrance."

Abruptly Twi's soundtrack cut in: babble, footsteps, the flight announcer, the clatter of distant baggage, all echoing just enough to complete the illusion of the great dome. Distantly the roar of

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the rockets penetrated it all. Around her, the other players arranged themselves amid the teeming holographic masses.

"Action," said the voice, and the cast began to mill, blending their motion into the general milieu, moving in and out of the holo fields without a break. Out of the corner of her eye, Zena spotted Walter push through the crowd at the entrance and approach the ticket counter. She made her way slowly in that direction, too, but stopped a couple of meters behind him. She should have joined the line at this point but, incredibly, the two actors who were supposed to have stood behind him, and in front of her, had missed their cues.

She was jostled, was shot annoyed glances by others in the crowd as she looked around. But she had no idea who to look for. She felt stupid and awkward simply standing there, so with a sigh she stepped forward, attempting inconspicuousness, and fell into line behind Walter. At least she was following her blocking, even if the others weren't. She wondered who the missing actors were, what had happened to delay them. Not that it was terribly important in practical terms—it was conceivable that this scene wasn't even being recorded, was simply for Walter's benefit. And it was unlikely that Walter would recognize her in her new make-up. Still, though, it was disconcerting. Mistakes simply did not occur in Glaize's productions.

A fleck of lint lay on Walter's left shoulder, and she had to resist a momentary urge to pick it off. That was irritating. She had trouble getting into Judith's role when she needed to, and now she had trouble getting out of it.

The line was slow, and Zena saw Walter glance at his digital watch several times. He looked around the spaceport, clearly impressed by its dimensions, and as he looked down his gaze snagged on hers. He frowned. She turned away, trying to look bored, and yawned. Her stomach tightened.

When she felt him touch her elbow she jumped.

"Excuse me," he said, "but haven't we—"

"*Hey*!" Someone with a loud voice was tugging on Walter's sleeve. It was a man in his fifties, dressed in shiny black shoes, bright blue bermuda shorts, and an orange tie-dyed vest. An ancient film camera was slung over his shoulder on a strap. "Hey," he bellowed again over the tumult of the crowd, "don't I know you from somewhere?"

Walter, his mouth gaping, looked from the man to Zena and back again. Zena crossed her arms and looked away, wishing

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desperately to vanish suddenly and permanently from the set.

"Yeah," said the interloper, "yeah, now I remember. You're the guy they pulled out of the deepfreeze a few months back."

"Well," said Walter, "I—"

"As soon as I saw you I says to myself, Humphrey, that face you have seen before on the news tapes. And I was right! Cancer case, wasn't it? Hey, Olive!"

A woman some years older than Humphrey shuffled over and peered myopically into Walter's face. Zena could not resist staring out of the corner of her eye. The woman wore a halter top, knickers, and a ringlet wig, all the brightest red. It was Orr, Zena realized suddenly. She had to hold back a smile.

"Hey, Olive," said Humphrey. "This is the guy they thawed out last year. Remember?"

"What?" said Orr/Olive in a cracking falsetto. "Frog? What frog?"

"*Thawed*," persisted Humphrey. "You remember. He was froze for more'n thirty years. What was his name? Dooley? Dudney?"

"Datney," muttered Walter. "Walter Datney." He looked as if he, too, wanted the floor to swallow him. While Humphrey photographed Olive with her arm around him, Walter's gaze returned to Zena. His eyes narrowed, and he opened his mouth to speak—

"Next!" yelled the ticket agent. Walter hurried to the counter to buy a shuttle ticket with his bulky green credit-cube while Zena stood behind him feeling the sweat trickle down her ribs, feeling a dozen sharp glances from other players. Why hadn't she spent more time with her make-up? He must have seen through it. The urge to slip away and melt into the crowd was strong, but she resisted. That might only reinforce Walter's curiosity and suspicion.

Above their heads, the flight announcer called out the all-aboard for the Paris shuttle (thank god for Twi at the controls!), and as soon as the ticket agent slapped down the small plastic ticket Walter rushed off. He paused once before he left the dome to glance back at Zena, but she averted her face and gesticulated to the ticket agent, holding her breath until the tinny voice in her left ear said, "All clear."

The soundtrack cut off, the holographic crowd faded out, and the players broke character en masse and strolled back toward the dressing room. Zena leaned against the ticket counter and rubbed her forehead, trying to ignore the stares of the other

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players. Someone laid a hand on her shoulder and she shrugged it off roughly, but it was Orr. He pulled off his red wig and the halter top. The breasts came with it.

"Hey," he said, kneading the base of her neck. "Come on. Let's get out of these and go home."

"What *took* you so long?"

Orr's eyebrows rose slightly. "Let me tell you, that was the quickest improv I'd had to do in a long time."

Zena shook her head. "You must have been at least four minutes late. Look, I'm sorry, I'm not trying to bludgeon you with it, but you put me in a very tight spot there for a while. I thought he was going to recognize me."

Orr looked incredulous. "Begging your pardon, Zena," he said softly, "but it looked to me as if I got you *out* of that tight spot, not into it."

For a moment she was too confused to think. "You mean . . . *oh.*" She sagged against him. "God, I'm sorry, Orr, I thought you and . . . Humphrey . . . were the two actors who missed their cues. I wasn't supposed to be standing next to Walter."

"Then why were you?" Orr's voice was quiet, his expression serious. "Zena, a few minutes ago you came very, very close to blowing this whole production and sending that poor displaced man into catatonia, maybe death."

She gaped at him. "But those two actors—"

"Had nothing to do with you. You still shouldn't have made contact with Datney." Orr sighed and smiled at her wearily. "Come on, now, it turned out for the best, didn't it? You've learned something. Let's get out of here, okay?"

Still shaky, she let him guide her back to the dressing room. Together they stripped off their make-up and plastic clothes, passed through the mister and blowers, and walked back through the set. The holo frames, now blank, were sliding into the floor and walls. The back of the Lexington Avenue set was visible. Zena and Orr walked into the New York alley and started down the street, arm in arm. The scene was changing at a leisurely pace; Walter's "shuttle" would take more than an hour to reach Paris. Around them, buildings and background scrims were falling, rising, transforming New York into the French metropolis as if with a slow turn of a kaleidoscope. The overhead scrim turned a deeper shade of blue, the architecture around them became more baroque, streets widened and narrowed. Even the air began to smell fresher, less humid. Glaize's Paris was coming alive.

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The sidewalk in front of them glowed red and they stopped. Orr put his arm around her waist as the concrete and asphalt began a heaving, twisting dance. "Paris is so gorgeous this time of the year," he said.

She pushed his arm away. "I don't know anything," she said. "I don't know what to think or feel. This role, this whole production, is turning me inside out."

"Hey," said Orr, "don't take it so hard. Everybody klinks a scene now and then."

"It's not just the spaceport scene," she said. "It's playing the part of Walter's lover when he thinks it's for real. It's the way the rest of the troupe resents me." She brushed a strand of hair from his eyes. "Except for you." He put his arm around her waist again, and this time she held his hand to her belly.

"It isn't fair," she said. "Am I to be punished just because Glaize likes my acting?"

Orr said nothing, merely regarded her with pursed lips.

She gazed down into the churning street. "Orr, it's getting hard to take."

"Why not ask Glaize for a vacation?"

"No!" She pulled away to face him. "This is my chance. I have to stay with it. If the rest of them want to hold their petty professional jealousy against me, then let them. They won't chase me away."

"Hey, hey," he said. "You're taking this too seriously. Listen, let's go back to your apartment and we'll talk. Unload your worries on the Omniscient Orr, okay?"

The street before them had finally settled down into a narrow cobblestone alley lined with two-story brick houses. Planters choked with petunias and geraniums hung from the windows. The sidewalk had turned green. Orr grabbed her arm and went on, practically dragging Zena along.

A group of five actors, hooting, singing, pounding one another's backs, swung around the corner and approached on the other side of the alley. "Bon appetit, monsieur le farceur," one of them called. Orr waved and three of them waved back as they passed. Zena recognized none of their faces.

"Ah," said Orr, smiling, "the vagaries of the artistic temperament."

She laughed. "You can't help mugging for the cameras, can you, even between scenes? That bit you did in the spaceport was hilarious."

"They were recording then, and, anyway, we had to take Datney's attention off you," said Orr. "Besides, that's the way I am. I play roles,

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they don't play me." He grinned, then bent into a handstand, cartwheeled twice down the block, and ended with a backflip, landing catlike on his feet. Arms wide, as if to embrace the artificial sky, he proclaimed, "When all the world's a stage, then what is there but to strut and play?"

"Oh, stop it," Zena laughed, applauding. "You're insufferable." The tension was finally draining from her. Orr held out his hand and she ran to him, laughing, feeling fine and alive, at home on the streets of a Paris that had never been. As they made their way to her apartment, Orr chattered to her about the foibles of the other actors in the troupe.

Her building was now a Parisian hotel, but her apartment was as she had left it, twenty-third century Colonial. Orr went straight to the toilet hole by the window and squatted with his weight against the back rest, the afternoon light on his hair and shoulders.

"I can't believe you have to use one of those porcelain monstrosities whenever that cretin is around," he said.

Cretin? The mood slipped from her. She shook her head, tried to smile and failed. She felt as if she had just lost something. She lay on the mattress field in the center of the floor, face down, feeling the pressure of the invisible, nearly intangible support against her nose, her forehead, her mouth.

"All right," said Orr. He stood, walked to the wall, and leaned back. The floor beneath him bulged into a soft white body-length pillow to cradle him. "Are you in love with Datney?"

"No." She raised herself on her elbows. "God, no! It's just . . . that I feel sorry for him. And guilty for my own complicity."

"I'll tell it by the numbers," he said. "One, you're tired. You probably haven't had a good solid sleep for days, maybe weeks. Every problem seems ten times its size, like New York City to Walter Datney." He clasped his hands behind his head. "Second . . . let's

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see . . . the other actors. I don't know what you expect, Zena. They've only known you for the past month, while most of them have been working with each other, with Glaize, for years. It's understandable that they resent your prominence in this production, but there'll be other plays. Give them time. You're personable, likeable." He smiled at her. "Of course, I'm prejudiced."

She smiled back wanly. "Sometimes I can't tell when you're kidding."

"And that's another thing," he said. He leaned forward, all lightness gone from his face, from his voice. "None of these things would get to you if you'd just take them as they come, then let them go. If you'd just relax."

She was nearly frightened by him just then. His intensity was completely unexpected.

He flopped back in the seat. "But I don't suppose you can do that, can you?" Almost as if he were speaking to himself.

"Orr?"

He waved for her to be quiet. "You're too concerned with perfection. I've experienced a few of your performances with Datney on the monitors and I think you do a fine job. When you do slip up, it's because you're worrying too much. Of course he notices little inconsistencies now and then. Not just with you but with all of us at times. No one's personality is completely consistent even in what we call real life. We act out of character, we do strange things. Datney is just hypersensitive because everything is so new to him. And if he thinks that a woman in the spaceport looks vaguely similar to his lover Judith, well, we all see strangers who look oddly familiar."

His reassuring tone was nearly enough in itself. She wanted to believe. "Orr," she said, "if Walter finds out, he won't be able to stand it. I've seen the tapes of the others. This is so dangerous. He could go

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insane." She shook her head. "It isn't right."

"But he won't find out," said Orr. "And as long as he doesn't, no one is hurt. It's farcical to talk about the ethics of giving someone an artificial world when he could not possibly function in the real one."

"You don't have to love him."

"No, that's true, I don't have to love him," said Orr quietly. "It must be very difficult." He walked over, sat next to her on the mattress field, and began to stroke her hair. "You should never have thought it would be easy, Zena." He spoke haltingly, as if the words were pins, as if he had taken her pain for his own. "You came to work for Glaize because he's an artist, because you're an artist, and art is never an easy thing. If this play were simply a nostalgic pastiche . . . but it isn't. If it's any single thing, it's a study in conflict between realities, and this conflict is bound to resonate in each of our parts. Your part especially, because for now you're the star." He sighed. "It *is* difficult, and there lies the challenge. We have to cope."

She squeezed his hand. "Don't take it so much to heart, love. It's my problem."

He shut his eyes and turned his face away. What would she do without him? She wrapped her arms around his waist, pressed her cheek to his chest. "I love you, Orr." Funny, she comforting him.

He glanced down at her, then leaned over to hug her shoulders, rolled across her body to lie beside her. She pressed close to the heat of him, searching his mouth with her lips, her tongue. "Orr, I love you. Orr."

Abruptly he sat up, seemed to be listening.

"Is it a stage call?" she asked. Not now!

He shook his head absently. Where was he? "You need your rest." He stood.

She could not speak, could not begin to follow what he might be thinking. She could only stare as he walked to the door.

"Get a good sleep," he said, smiling, charming. Facile? She felt completely lost.

"Do you love me?" she said, and hated herself for asking.

He nodded. "I just remembered a few things I have to take care of. Sleep. Take advantage of these four days." He winked at her and left.

She lay back on the mattress field and stared up at the liquid flow of colors across the ceiling. He was right. The play had been successful so far. All she had to do was keep going, keep getting better. Her problems were all in her head.

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And yet, until afternoon came, she lay there turning, unable to sleep.

Paris was beautiful in the spring of two thousand and three. Flocks of pigeons warbled from roof to roof, gendarmes choppered through the fresh, clean air. Crowds of young and old laughed and sipped their espresso at sidewalk cafe tables. Lovers strolled hand-in-hand beside the sparkling Seine where artists stood, trying to capture the mood on their holographic easels.

Zena shook her head and smiled as she walked beside the river. The illusion of water was so complete she could see her own shattered reflection in its ripples. The scenery the artists strove to reproduce was itself a holographic facade, and in fact many of the artists were pre-recorded extras in Glaize's set. The boundaries between illusion and the real melted here, and ran.

The Paris set was the largest Glaize had designed for Walter: nearly five square kilometers. In the four days of his visit it would have been impossible to restrict his movements to a few city blocks. Paris was a city for long, leisurely strolls on whim, and although the stage crew was capable of assembling scenery in front of Walter as he walked down a street, it was more convenient to have a large, stable set he could wander through. It was up to the cast to deflect him if he strayed too far in any one direction.

Zena stopped at the toilettes des dames to put on her face for the up-coming scene. The dressing room was the same as it had been before the spaceport scene, except for a large, gaudy banner someone had strung above the mirror that read ARS EST CELARE ARTEM. The several actors lounging before the mirror stopped their chatter as she walked in. Zena smiled at them, refusing to feel snubbed on such a glorious day, and gestured to the banner. "What does it say?"

The actors looked at one another. A tall blonde man with a large nose said, "Wouldn't *you* like to know."

"Alors!" said an older woman beside him. "Adrian, don't be such a cat." Zena recognized her: Jo, one of the older members of Glaize's troupe. Her lean face was unrestructured just now. In fact the only change Zena could detect was a black streak in her long grey hair. She turned to Zena. "Don't pay any attention to him, child. The banner reads *Ars est celare artem*. The true art is to conceal art. The motto of our troupe."

Zena smiled at her. "I like that." She even smiled at Adrian,

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and sat down to change her face.

"*That*'s not our motto," said Adrian. "Our motto is Splendide Mendax."

"Adrian, shut up," Jo said sharply.

"Actually we don't even have a motto. I mean."

Jo cleared her throat. "At any rate," she said, "as I was saying, I *like* this fantasy of what Paris might have been like once upon a time. That's the whole point. I spend every other Wednesday in Paris with my third wife, and it hasn't a bit of the charm of this set. Go ahead, darling, just ask me if Paris is boring."

Beside her, Adrian rolled his eyes. "Tell me, Jo," he said in a world-weary tone, "is Paris boring?"

"Is Paris boring? Is Paris boring! My dear boy, Paris is so boring even the drama critics have emigrated." The other actors hissed and groaned.

"Jo's right," someone said. "France is just one vast desert of computer plantations and fast-crêpe franchises."

"The highest form of culture in Paris," added Jo, "is the baroque petard."

There was a moment of bewildered expressions, then Jo and a couple of others burst out laughing.

"But anyway," Jo went on, "my point is, why put up with the real Paris when we have such a lovely, nostalgic substitute? Why not build a permanent set along these lines? With real housing, real markets. . . "

"Who'd pay for it?" said Adrian.

"I would," said Jo.

"Merde, alors!"

"No, I mean I'd pay my share. The rent couldn't be much higher than what I now pay for my apartments in Utah and Spain."

"You're right," someone else chimed in. "And we could use all of Glaize's old set designs. Medieval Rome, Sung Dynasty China, pre-Roman England, post-industrial Thibet—"

Zena turned on her stool, eyebrow pen in hand. "I'm not so sure Glaize would allow his designs to be used for commercial enterprise," she said. "He's an artist."

Adrian snorted. "What do you think *this* is, an act of charity?" He snickered at his own joke, turned to Jo. "Who is that, anyway?"

Jo bent close and whispered in his ear.

"Oh," he said. Then, "Oh!" His left eyebrow soared. "How tragically unhip of me not to have recognized the star of our produc-

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tion." He bowed, played at nearly falling from his stool.

Zena swallowed, forced a smile. "I'm only in a supporting role," she said lightly. "Walter's the real star."

Adrian snorted, and after a moment said, "Yes, of course, how clumsy of me. But then, Walter doesn't know that, does he?"

One of the others laughed.

Jo spoke up. "This is your first role in one of Glaize's productions, isn't it?"

Zena nodded.

"You take him very seriously."

"Shouldn't I?"

"She takes herself seriously," said Adrian. "That's her problem."

"Now, Adrian—"

"No," he persisted, "I mean it. Did you see how she nearly klinked that whole scene yesterday out of sheer nervousness? And she only had a bit part then. That kind of thing wouldn't happen if she weren't so morbidly intense about the whole production."

Zena slapped down the eyebrow pen and stood to face him. "Do you have any idea what would happen if Walter found out this was all just a play? Have you ever stopped to consider *him* seriously? If he found out, he'd go insane, just like all the others. No, *Adrian*, this isn't just another play!"

Adrian sighed and walked to the door. "See what I mean?" he said to the others. He winked at Zena. "You're quite the prima donna." And left.

Zena realized she was shaking. She dropped back onto the stool and turned to the mirror to finish her make-up. In the glass her image blurred. Her eyes stung. The eye-liner slipped and she swore, wiped off the flaw and started again. Behind her the other actors gathered their props and filed out, whispering among themselves. Jo paused for a moment behind her to give her a smile and a wink that was totally unlike the identical gesture from Adrian. Zena did her best to smile back, and soon was alone.

Damn, she thought, why did she always have to get into these arguments with the others? She hardly had a friend in the cast. Except—and she smiled bleakly at her reflection—except Orr. Walter was little comfort. Poor, dear Walter. Might he blissfully remain ignorant of his true situation.

"Places," said the voice in her ear. "Scene twelve, Restaurant de Champs." There was a pause, then, "Zena, you're on in one minute."

She swore and rushed through the rest of her makeup, slipped

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out of her shorts and into the light dress that waited for her on the rack. At least the costumes here weren't all made of slick plastic. On a shelf above the costume rack, a daffodil bloomed from a black slab. She plucked it, slid the stem into her hair above her ear, and hurried from the dressing room.

The next scene called simply for her to blend into the restaurant crowd. Walter had spent the day in conference with his Paris vice-presidents who were now taking him to dinner. Just this one scene, then Zena had the rest of the evening free; the script had assigned her no role in the after-dinner party to be given in Walter's honor.

She ran down the street. The restaurant was several blocks from the dressing-room. She paused a moment outside to compose herself, then walked in. Her escort (it was Adrian!) waited in the foyer, scowling and tapping his foot.

"Marlena! Pourquoi es-tu en retard?" He grabbed her roughly by the elbow and hustled her into the dining room. People glanced up, forks and wine glasses halfway to their mouths. Zena's face grew hot.

"What are you doing?" she whispered fiercely. "This wasn't in the script!"

"Ta gueule!" He shoved her into a chair and sat opposite, glaring at her over his menu. "Salope!"

Zena slouched, opened her menu, and hid behind it. The utter ass! She couldn't decide if he was ad libbing or not. It was difficult to imagine anyone deliberately crashing a scene in one of Glaize's plays, yet no one had informed her of a script alteration. Surely she hadn't been more than one or two minutes late for the scene. Why couldn't he simply have walked in with her gracefully when she did arrive? Was he really that hard up for a moment of glory in front of the cameras? Or—she lowered her menu to peer at him suspiciously—was he deliberately trying to sabotage her?

"Bonjour, monsieur, madame." A waiter stood beside the table, palm recorder poised. "Vous désirez?"

Adrian cleared his throat. "Un filet de soy, du brocoli au gratin, et du vin blanc sec."

Zena quickly ran her gaze down the menu. "Pour moi," she said, "des artichaux farcis, seulement."

"Bien entendu, monsieur, madam." The waiter took their menus and walked away, murmuring into his recorder.

Zena glanced around the restaurant. The other actors had resumed eating. No one stared except—

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There was Walter across the room, looking right at her. She put her elbows on the table and rubbed her forehead to hide her face. Had he recognized her again? She hadn't expected he would be here already. Could she have misread the script? Maybe they had had to ad lib earlier and had shifted up the time—

Adrian yanked her hands away from her face. "Marlena!" he snapped. "Qu'est-ce que tu as? Regarde-moi quand nous sommes ensemble!" People were staring again. She leaned across the table and hissed: "Just tell me one thing before I kill you. Did you miss your entrance in the spaceport scene yester—"

"Anglais? Tu sais que je ne parle pas anglais! Qu'est-ce que tu me fais?" Adrian stood suddenly, knocking over his chair, and slapped her across the face. She yelled and lost her balance. By the time she got to her feet he was on his way out the door.

"Pig!" she screamed after him. God, no, she thought, that was English. "Cochon!" The restaurant was in an uproar. Two waiters rushed over and tried to calm her down. She threw her napkin at them and seethed away.

Had Walter caught the slip? She glanced across the room from the foyer and saw him looking at her, looking concerned, conferring with his companions. Don't think, just get out.

On the street, Adrian was not in sight. Zena kicked a newspaper stand and sent it flying, started down the sidewalk, elbowing extras aside as she passed. Damn that idiot Adrian to hell! Of all the unprofessional, egotistical, pigheaded things to have done! She stopped where the street crossed the Seine, stood clutching the rail to stare into the illusory waters.

"This is Zena," she subvocalized. "I want to talk to Glaize. *Now.*"

"I'm sorry," came the tinny voice in her ear. "Glaize isn't available right now. What are you doing out of character?"

"Out of character?" She nearly yelled it. "Haven't you been plugged into the monitors? I'm not even in the scene any more! Somebody had better get that ass Adrian out of the production, because the next time I see him I'm going to tear his head off."

She got no response. Adrenalin had made her stomach a knot, made her feel like crying. She fought it back. Maybe Orr had been right, maybe she should talk to Glaize about a va—

No. Her fist struck the railing. She wouldn't give it up. This was the first really crucial role of her career, and she wouldn't be squeezed out of it by a spiteful cast. This was her show—

Someone touched her shoulder and she whirled, fists clenched.

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It was Walter. She nearly threw up.

"Excuse me, Miss . . . mademoiselle . . . " Walter bit the side of his lip. "Do you speak—"

"Pardonnez-moi," she muttered, moving away, "mais je ne parle pas anglais . . ."

Walter looked crestfallen.

She stopped, then, and smiled. To hell with the script. "I am sorry," she said with an accent, "what did you say?"

Walter glanced toward the restaurant, back at her. "I was in there . . . I mean, I saw that guy . . . I mean—" He ran his fingers through his thinning hair, shook his head. "This is a fine job." He met her gaze. "I was worried about you."

"Oh, please, monsieur," she said, relaxing. "Do not concern yourself. Antoine, he is still such a young boy inside, no? He will not come near me again." She laughed and made a thkkk-sound as she strangled an unseen neck.

Walter laughed, too. "Well," he said, "I'm glad you're all right. Would you—" and he looked down the street again, and back "—like a drink?" He looked so disarming she had to laugh.

"Merci," she said, thinking of the stuffed artichokes she had ordered, "but . . . no. I never drink on an empty stomach."

"Oh my gosh, how stupid of me." Walter struck his forehead gently with his palm. "Look," he said, "just between you and me, I could never stand snails. I'm starved."

"Escargot?" She leaned over and said confidentially, "I hate them, too."

"Well, look," said Walter. "Already we've got something in common. Let's go somewhere and grab a bite, okay? What do you say?"

Zena frowned and searched his face. The transceiver in her ear was silent: presumably Glaize did not object to her unplanned role in Walter's evening. Or perhaps he saw no way to compensate for Adrian's faux pas. Besides, Walter had not appeared to see through her disguise. She took a deep breath. "Oui," she said. "I would like that."

"Great!" They started down the street. "You know," he said, "I've been locked up all day with those stuffed shirts. It's a relief to get out and talk to someone real for a change."

Her smile faded: she had to force it back. She put out her hand. "My name is Marlena Didereaux."

"My gosh, I'm sorry. I'm Walter Da—uh, Davis. Just call me Walt."

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She nodded. "Walt."

"Hey, wait right here." He ran out into the traffic to flag down a taxi. A bus screeched to a stop to avoid hitting him—Zena froze—and he doubled up with laughter. The bus driver, recovered, leaned out of the window to shake his fist and yell. Zena found herself laughing, too. She ran after him and they piled into the cab. Walter gave the cabbie the name of his hotel in such an atrocious accent that she started giggling all over again. They both collapsed in hysterics on the back seat. It was going just fine.

"Oh," gasped Walter, "this is too much!" He brushed tears from the corners of his eyes and chuckled again. "I haven't felt this good since . . . "

"Oui?"

He bit his lip, then giggled, leaned over and tapped the cabbie on the shoulder. "Cancel that order," he said. "We want to go to the Eiffel Tower!"

"La Tour Eiffel," grunted the cabbie. Zena noticed only then that he was Orr, and smiled with pleasure. He spun the car across the traffic till she and Walter were weak with laughter again.

Although she watched for it she never noticed the moment when the cab reached the edges of the set and the holographic window scenery was switched on. At least the crew was taking care of business out there. The drive lasted a convincingly long time, about twenty minutes, before they pulled up to the full-scale mockup of the Eiffel Tower. Walter paid with his credit cube and the cabbie winked at them. Zena winked back.

She and Walter walked to a nearby restaurant and ate a pleasant, uneventful meal, then strolled back to the Tower. They took the elevator to the top and there, with several other tourists, strolled around the windy cupola. In the east and south the lights of Paris were blinking on; the sun was setting gloriously in the west. North, across the Seine, the Champs Élysées stretched like a molten river from the Louvre over to the Arc de Triomphe which squatted, a glistening crown.

"Beautiful," said Walter.

Zena murmured assent. Glaize was a master in his field.

Walter had been moody since they had left the restaurant. She touched his arm. "Something is wrong, Walt? You look so sad."

"Oh," he said wearily, "it's nothing, really." He met her gaze and smiled wanly. "I guess I've just been working too hard. Plus . . . "

"Yes?"

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He shrugged. "Oh, just a lot of little things, nothing I can really put my finger on." He turned his back to the railing and leaned against it, gripped it with his hands. "Marlena," he said finally, "have you ever thought you were going insane?"

She swallowed hard, tried to cover with a laugh. "You are joking, Walt?"

He shook his head. "Have you ever seen somebody, some stranger, in a whole different part of the world, who looks so much like someone you see all the time at home?"

She stared at him, considering whether to act as if she didn't understand, then nodded. "Yes, of course. Walt, I am a stewardess on a shuttlecraft. I am in all the countries of the world, every month. I often see people I think I know. Does not everyone experience this . . . déjà vu?"

"No," he said. "Yes, I know, but it happens to me constantly. Every week I see four or five people I think I ought to recognize. I stare and stare, but . . . I can never remember." He looked away, glanced back. "You."

"Comment?" Behind her back, she dug at the cuticle of her thumb.

"You look familiar, too." He turned his head, stared at her from the corner of his eye. "When I saw you in the restaurant, I had this feeling . . . "

Zena forced a smile. "That is not so unusual, no? I felt the same when you approached me on the street. I thought, Marlena, you have seen this man before, somewhere, sometime. This is, qu'est-ce que c'est . . . rapport, no? Affinity."

"Yes, yes, there's all that." He sounded almost annoyed. "But at least in your case, there's a logical explanation. You see, Marlena—" He laid his hands firmly on her shoulders. "I didn't tell you the truth about myself."

"No?"

"My name is Walter Datney. Six months ago—"

"Ah!" She clapped her hands once. "But of course, you are the man brought back to life. How do you say it, cryo. . . "

"Cryogenic suspension," he said. "That's right. I died of cancer thirty-two years ago. They kept my body in a tank of liquid nitrogen until late last year, when they perfected the means to revive me and correct the disease. So far I'm the only one to have survived the process."

"You are a very lucky man," she told him.

"You think so?" he snapped. Then his expression changed to

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despair. "I'm beginning to think I was better off dead."

"Walt, please! Do not say this thing!"

He frowned as if puzzled by pain. "It's not that I'm . . . unhappy, here. I'm healthy again. In the thirty years I was frozen, my company grew, and now I'm a very wealthy man. I live in a comfortable apartment in New York City. I'm in love with a wonderful girl." He glanced up. "That's who you remind me of: Judith. There's something about you. . . ." His eyes lost their focus again. "I've had to start from scratch in so many ways—friends, favorite haunts . . . None of my friends from the old days are still alive; their children are grown, they don't remember me. I miss my wife terribly, in spite of Judith's love. I've had to get used to all this new technology. But basically I've been happy, except—" He turned to face the city. Zena saw tears leak from his eyes, streak down his cheeks.

"Walt—" She put her arms around him but he broke away, began to pace back and forth, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"The process," he muttered, "it's got to be the process. There must have been some deterioration, some—" He stopped, buried his face in his hands, and shuddered. "Brain damage," came his muffled voice. "They should have let me stay dead!"

Zena, mute, shook her head, felt tears of her own in the cool wind. "Oh, Walter," she said, moving to him, hugging him close. She didn't know what she could say without adding to his fears. Damn Glaize, anyway! He might have been a master at theatre—experienced by people who paid for it, who wanted to believe—but clearly he wasn't good enough to fool anyone completely. Walter was shaking convulsively in her arms. The tourists—the other players—gathered at a distance on the chilly platform. Zena gave them a savage look and guided Walter back toward the elevator. The gate clanked open, a gabbing knot of extras tumbled out, and she hustled him into the cage, pulled the gate shut. The elevator operator looked at her questioningly and she made a quick downward gesture with her thumb.

"Hey," she said to Walter, "there, there, it's going to be okay. . ." And felt him stiffen in her arms, pull away. His face was ghastly in the arc lamp light flickering between the girders as the cage clanked and squealed down on its rails.

"*You*," he breathed raggedly. "You lost your accent just now, didn't you? You spoke with Judith's voice, didn't you? You're not French at all!" He looked around wildly, shouted, "None of you are! None of you!" He backed up to the wall of the elevator cage,

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his arms spread wide, his head pulled back as far as it would go, yet still he kept his eyes on her. She felt suddenly afraid for herself, not just for him.

"I'm not going crazy," he said in a strained voice. "Oh, no! It's you, you're all pretending! I'm not really here at all." His face screwed up and he began to slide down the cage wall till he hung by his hands, his fingers twisted into the mesh, his legs useless on the floor. A low, strangled sound was wrenched from his throat.

Zena stood shivering before him, shaking her head again and again. "Oh, no," she said. "It's not true, Walt. Oh dear God, no."

And then the lift jerked to a stop, the door was flung wide, and Walter was out and running across the plaza, colliding with extras, falling and running again. Zena started after him but she stumbled and fell to her knees, watched him disappear into the night scenery. She sank to the cold pavement. Hands touched her and she staggered to her feet, fought at the people standing around her, felt her fists hit home, and then she, too, ran into the glistening Paris night.

When the lift doors puffed apart, Zena lunged through and sprinted down the hall to her apartment. The door slid open: the rooms had changed back to the style of two thousand and three. She glanced into the wall mirror to make sure her Judith makeup was correct.

"Walter?" She ducked her head into the kitchen, ran through the bedroom, into the bathroom. He wasn't there. Wearily she sat on the edge of the tub and hung her head, breathing hard, feeling the pulse pound in her throat and in her knees. Where had he gone? The fear that he had escaped the set entirely chewed at the edge of her mind. If that had happened, there might be no hope of getting him back.

She tried her throat mike again. "This is Zena." Her voice was hoarse; she was panting too hard to subvocalize. "Where is Walter Datney? Do you have him on camera?" She struck the side of the tub with her fist. "Why don't you answer me!" No response. Damn them all.

What now? She stood and stumbled into the bedroom, clutched the window sill and stared out at the lights of Paris glittering in the night. No, not Paris, only a grandiose fake that Walter had finally seen through. Where had he gone? Where else could she look? She felt helpless.

"Zena?"

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She whirled.

Orr stood quietly in the doorway. "I thought I'd find you here." He was still wearing the make-up and uniform of a Parisian cabbie.

She walked toward him on unsteady legs. "He found out, Orr. Walter found out. He's out there, somewhere—"

"He's all right," said Orr. "He's resting now." He put his arm around her shoulders.

Zena shrugged him off. "Where?"

"Please, take it easy. Walter's fine. I found him myself and took him back to his hotel."

"I looked there!"

"We drove around for a while," said Orr. "We had a long talk."

She blew out a long breath and leaned back against the wall, closed her eyes. "So that's it. It's over."

"Whatever do you mean?" She felt him brush past her, heard the soft creak as the dresser chair took his weight. "We go on just as we have been," he said. "This evening was an entertaining dramatic crescendo, and now the story continues. The critics will love it."

"Orr, he *knows*!"

"The play must—"

"It's not a play, Orr, this isn't fiction! Not to Walter. It's his life. And now we've crushed it."

"Really, Zena, you're taking this whole thing much too seriously. No, don't interrupt, let me finish. Naturally we're all upset that Walter became so hysterical, but that sort of reaction is natural in a man who has died and been brought back to life after thirty years. Imagine! An entire generation."

"Is that what you told him?"

Orr nodded. "Essentially. I talked to him for over an hour. He was very calm when I left. I think he'll make it."

She looked at him sitting there, so placid, so unruffled. It would be unreasonable to stay angry. . . but she was fed up to there with being *reasonable*. "You're wrong," she said. "I don't believe it. He wasn't dead for thirty years, he was dead for centuries, and he knows it. He senses, despite all of our grand, artistic efforts to fool him, that the world isn't what it seems. This production isn't a work of art, it's a torture, it's a cruel, sadistic tease." She felt her face twist. "Well, I hope you're very satisfied. You've been successful. You've brought a man to his knees and made him squeal in pain."

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Orr's eyebrow rose. "That's awfully self-righteous coming from someone who pretended to love him."

"Do you think I'm proud of that?" She turned and started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Where do you think? I'm going to try to salvage what's left of your little white rat."

Orr sighed and got to his feet. "If you're determined to do even more damage," he said, "I don't suppose I can stop you. Only. . ."

Zena stopped, glanced back.

"Only first I think I should tell you what Glaize really had in mind."

She frowned, turned to face him, and realized that she still hoped he could convince her, somehow. Despite all that had happened, she still wanted to believe.

Orr began to pace in front of the bed. "Glaize didn't want to tell you this, because he thought that if you knew you wouldn't be able to play your role with sincerity." He paused briefly to give her a faint smile. "Glaize knows his actors completely."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm talking about what you call torture. I'm talking about art." He swept the air with his hands as he spoke. "Zena, I've been with Glaize's company longer than you've been acting. The man is a genius. I don't say that idly, but it's simple fact. He is gifted with a perception into the human psyche that few artists before him have shared.

"When Walter Datney was revived six months ago, Glaize immediately saw it as an opportunity that might come only once in a thousand years. Here was the perfect chance to combine Glaize's talent for historical pastiche with his eighty-year search for the human soul." Orr stopped and looked over at her. "When Datney was revived, the doctors had to cut him apart and put him back together to make him work. It was a minor thing to implant a hypothalamic tap."

"What. . . ?"

"You haven't been the star of this production, Zena, you've only been one of the supporting characters. Walter's been the real star." He took a step toward her. "Everything that has happened in the past few months—everything in the past few days—has been intended."

Zena shook her head slowly. "I can't believe you—"

"*Everything,*" said Orr. "Together we brought Walter Datney to

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the very edge of insanity—no, past the edge. Into the abyss. And together we will bring him out."

She took a step back.

He smiled. "The critics will love it."

She ran from the apartment, took the ag tube to the street, and flagged down a stagehand's buggy. The young woman at the wheel stepped down warily, glancing from Zena's face to her fists. Zena climbed into the seat and stamped on the accelerator, took off down the street with a squeal of the motor.

Three blocks from the Parisian hotel set, she ran the buggy into a granite building. On the other side of the holo flat was a sidewalk cafe. She ploughed through the empty tables and chairs, broke through a sunset, and pulled up in front of Walter's hotel.

His room was on the second floor. When her knock got no response she turned the doorknob and entered the room. Moonlight from the Paris set shone weakly through the bay window, illuminating the room just enough for Zena to make out Walter sitting up in bed. She bit her lip and approached slowly.

"Walter?" she said softly. "It's me, Judith." Walter said nothing. All she could see of his face was the moonlight reflecting off his eyes. She sat at the foot of the bed, carefully, and folded her hands in her lap.

"Walter, I've come to talk with you. My. . . my friend Orr told me that he found you and brought you here. I was terribly worried. Are you feeling better now?"

She felt awkward, her words stilted. Still he made no sound, made not the slightest movement. There—she heard him breathe. She managed a smile and wondered if he could see her face.

"Walter, I want you to listen very carefully to what I say. First, I . . . love you, Walter. I really do." She had to say something to get through to him. "We've both been used by people who have no idea how much pain they could cause." Tears crept from her eyes. She was crying for both of them—her ambition, his loneliness. "You've been fooled, and so have I. You've got to come with me, we've got to escape to some place where they can't control us, where they can't write a script for our feelings." She paused. What could he be thinking? Carefully she reached out and touched his hand. So cold. "Walter," she said, "I love you. Trust me, please."

The silence was so complete she could hardly breathe. Leaning forward, she found the bedside lamp and switched it on.

Zena jumped to her feet, her breath forced out with a reptilian

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sound. On the bed before her, a grin frozen on his lips, sat Walter Datney. His face trailed strips of pale flesh raked from the nose, the cheekbones, the chin, revealing a darker skin beneath. The eyes of someone else sparkled at her from behind Walter's puffy, ruined face.

"Very nice range," he said with Glaize's nasal baritone. "Horror, rage, sorrow, love . . . Yes. Very, very nice." He leaned toward her. "Now do you see how it's *supposed* to be done?"

The set was down, all but the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building, each standing at one end of the remaining twelve-block-long strip of pavement. The entire troupe was gathered under the shade of the Tower, drinking, chatting, entertaining one another with stories and skits. Zena stood to one side, watching, wanting to join in, yet still needing to be alone. She had not yet completely rejected her vow to leave the troupe; she had not yet sorted out the events of the past few weeks to her own satisfaction.

She saw Jo notice her from a cluster of actors. The older woman waved, but Zena shook her head. She needed time.

Orr walked up. "For the twentieth time, congratulations," he said. "How does it feel?"

She shrugged. There was too much to say; she could say nothing at all, least of all to him.

"We finished recording last night. Did you make it to the crowd scene?"

She shook her head, refused to meet his eyes.

"Glaize is doing the final editing himself. He's going to call it *Splendide Mendax*. The story of an actress's refusal to perpetuate a lie. What do you think?"

She looked away, shading her eyes to see the top of the Eiffel Tower. It looked so harmless, so playful in the daytime.

"Okay," he said finally. "I remember how it feels. I just wanted to say it one more time: you're a damn fine young actor. Once you get the Serky method down pat, you'll be able to emote on cue as strongly as you do when you think it's real." He paused. "Few actors get to play opposite Glaize, you know. Especially in their debut production." He hesitated as if to say something more, then turned and walked away.

To Zena's left, a woman was saying, "—but hasn't figured out a good schtick yet. Imagine, though. The poor boy is to think he's been stranded."

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She edged closer to listen.

"Hey, it's Zena! Come on over." That was Jo, standing at the back of the group. "Look who's here, everyone."

Heads turned. Zena made ready to walk away.

"Shut up, Jo," Adrian broke in. "You haven't a bit of sense." He looked at Zena. "We were just discussing our next production. Glaize is setting up a research front to take applications for time travel volunteers. Sixteenth-century Spain. We're trying to come up with a few plot complications."

Zena hesitated, hating them all, searching for a devastating line that would make them realize what they had done to her. Then she said, "Wasn't leprosy a major problem back then?"

"Oh my, yes!" said Adrian. "It certainly was."

And together they smiled.

SECOND SOLUTION TO THE SHOP ON BEDFORD STREET
(from page 58)

Magazines, like books, have even numbers on the left pages, odd numbers on the right. Therefore pages 27 and 28 are opposite sides of the same leaf. The number of missing leaves is five.

Several days later, when I went back to the shop to complain, I couldn't find it. I swear that at the spot where it had been the two brownstone houses on either side were smack against one another. When the check came back to me I saw that it was endorsed "Raymond Dero Palmer."

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A MIDSUMMER NEWT'S DREAM

by Stanley Schmidt

art: George Barr

Mr. Schmidt, immediately after selling this—ah—thing to us, was offered (and accepted) the editorship of Analog Science Fiction. *He says the story was inspired (if that's the word) by a field biology course he helped to teach last spring, and was written a few weeks later during a siesta on an Appalachian Trail lean-to in the Virginia mountains. He hopes it will not cause his poetic license to be revoked.*

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Once upon a time there was a newt who might as well be known as Natalie, since newts do not have names as we do. They do, however (though few people know this), have a network in which their admittedly tiny brains are linked telepathically to form a quite considerable intelligence. So when I say that Natalie had a dream, perhaps I should really say she had *part* of a dream—but that's getting unnecessarily picky. Let's just say that Natalie had a dream.

Natalie's dream was that some day a newt in shining armor would carry her off to faraway places to see strange new sights. And one bright June day Natalie's dream came true—though he who carried her off was not actually a newt at all, but a newtist named Nathan Newton.

You might object that Nathan should properly be called a herpetologist, but newts were all he really cared about, and in these days of specialization, his thesis requirements left little time to think about anything else. So a newtist he was. But those same requirements required that he find something *new* about newts, and that was his problem. He invented a new newt net (woven with a new newt knot) that was so successful that he started manufacturing them commercially and showed a net profit in the first month. But Nathan's scholarly advisors said that was mere gadgetry, and not truly novel news about newts. For a while that had him stumped, but then he got his great inspiration: why not ask a genuine newt? That required another newt-fangled invention, of course; but, despite the skepticism of his elders, Nathan did what he must.

And so Nathan and Natalie met. It was, as I say, a bright June day; and Natalie (not surprisingly) was swimming—in the nude; but that's quite acceptable among newts. She chanced into Nathan's newfangled newt net; and thus, though it was not quite what she'd had in mind, she was off to those strange new places (and Nathan was one step closer to his degree).

Nathan's lab stood on a prominent highland known locally as Bald Mountain, and he often played background music by Moussorgsky while he worked. Moussorgsky does not sound at his best underwater; and, though Natalie was fairly tolerant and her surroundings were otherwise fairly pleasant, she began to wish desperately there were some way she could ask Nathan to shut it off.

Luckily, communication was exactly what Nathan had in mind. He had guessed the existence of the newt network and had built a gadget to monitor its thoughts and translate them into terms

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more or less intelligible to his own enormous and fuzzy kind (and vice versa). As soon as Natalie realized that was what he was doing, she mustered all the energy of her relatives to tell him: "*Shut that thing off!*"

He did, and then tried excitedly to converse about all manner of things. But Nathan and Natalie had little in common, and she was tired and didn't feel like talking. Eventually Nathan gave up and went away.

When he came back, Natalie learned that the newtist was also a flutist, but at least he didn't play Moussorgsky. Actually his playing was rather soothing, and Natalie was now in a mellow mood anyway—because during the night she had laid a goodly number of eggs which would soon become new newts. So this time when he tried to talk, she (and/or the network) listened and responded and decided he really wasn't a bad sort. But he was unhappy.

"They don't believe me," he said when she asked, and then he had to try to explain the whole concept of graduate theses—which, since newts are civilized beings, wasn't easy. "They want something new, but they won't believe I can talk to you. They say it's the newtiest thing they ever heard."

Natalie winced but promised to think it over. Nathan played his flute a lot; and, as the days dragged on, Natalie grew restless too. Her new newts hatched, and they were so cute she longed to show them to their father (who was a pretty cute newt himself). Nathan did hire a newt nanny to help take care of them, but that was a poor substitute. And worst of all, he started playing Moussorgsky again.

That was the last straw, and she told him so. And she told him she was tired of being kept in a bowl like a fish and she wanted to go home.

"Not," he snapped without even turning the music down, "until you tell me what's new with you newts."

"Nothing's new," she snapped back, turning to rebuff a newtlet who was being naughty. "And I won't tell you *anything* until you turn that off."

He did, grudgingly. "Thanks," said Natalie. "If you must have music, why don't you play your flute?"

He looked at her, belatedly astonished. "You can hear the difference?"

"Of course. Can't you?"

"Yes, but I never knew newts could . . . I didn't even know you

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could . . . by golly, that's it!"

And so it was. The committee cheerfully accepted Nathan's thesis, "Mechanisms of Pitch Discrimination and Musical Taste in *Diemictylus viridescens*," Natalie got to go home with her brood, and they all lived happily ever after.

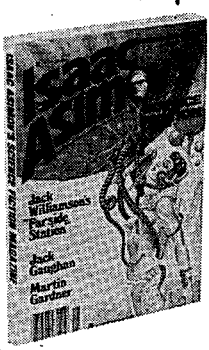
But one day long efterward, when one of her offspring returned to the water and asked her to retell the story, he said, "But why was Nathan so surprised?"

"He's only human," said Natalie. "I don't think any of them ever suspected we had musical taste. I don't think they even knew we could hear, until Nathan told them."

"Incredible! And did you know he was that ignorant when you went off with him?"

Natalie smiled wisely, or would have had she been so equipped. "Of course," she said. "I newt all along."

Now Monthly



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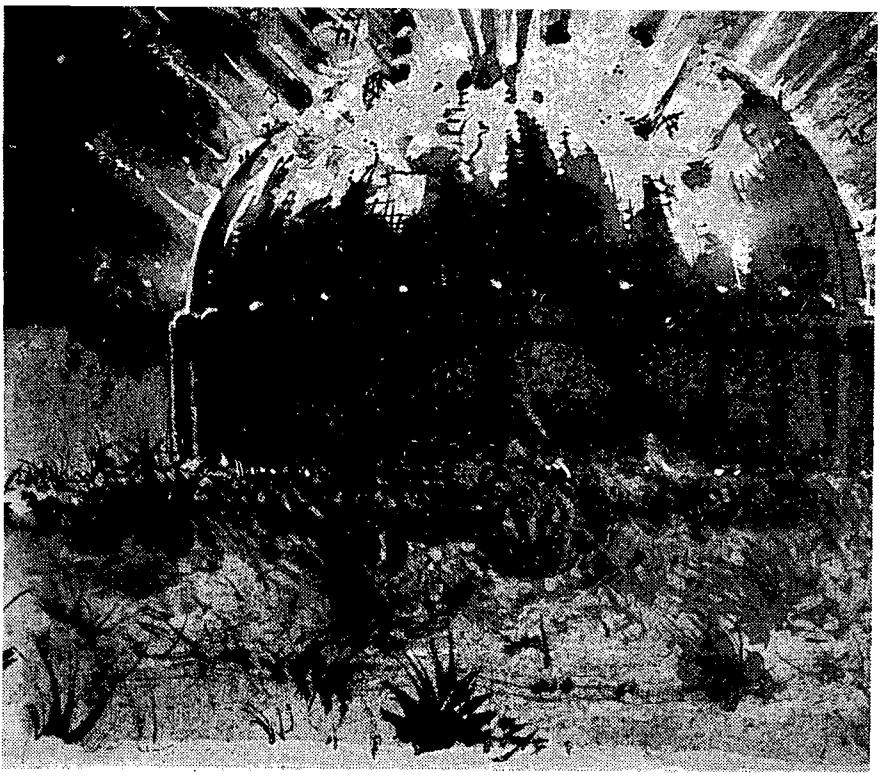

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SCOOP

by Michael A. McCollum
art: Karl B. Kofoed

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The author is 32, married, with a wife, Cathy, and two children, Bobby—age 5—and Mikey—age 2. After training in Aerospace Propulsion and Nuclear Engineering, he somehow became a Pneumatic Controls Specialist, something for which he has had no training whatever, but which he seems to be pretty good at.

Ever wake up one morning to find you were fat, balding, and forty? That the youthful genius who set out two decades earlier to blaze a trail of glory for himself was gone, and the great accomplishments were mostly undone?

No? Well give yourself time. The moment of truth will come someday. It did for me.

It's not that my life has been a total failure. Far from it. I have any number of professional feathers in my cap. I singlehandedly exposed the Carbelli Land Fraud Case ten years ago. I was nominated as one of the ten best reporters in the state. I'm a past president of the Downtown Kiwanis Club. But those kudos are all minor league. I can't truthfully say I've ever done anything truly great.

Before muttering a comment about male menopause, consider the following: my *ex* is a shrew. My alimony payment to her is big enough to break the back of an elephant and two weeks late. Beth, my girl friend, has started making not so subtle hints about matrimony. The only things I have to show for my twenty years with the paper are a condominium mortgaged to the hilt and a whopping great hole in the lining of my stomach, for which I have been sentenced to a gallon of cow juice daily and never again to allow liquor to pass my lips.

Is it any wonder that I sometimes have trouble getting up in the morning?

I was sitting at my typewriter, immersed in my troubles, when I was jolted out of my reverie by Stringham, the proofreader's assistant.

"Hey, Tarkington. The Boss wants to see you. Better get in there. He sounds mad."

"He always sounds mad," I snapped, looking up from the pitifully inadequate copy I had been trying to rough out. I was covering Mrs. Roper-Johnson-Smythe's society bash that evening. I was

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also taking Beth to the Suns game. If I could work out the story in advance, leaving only the names of the distinguished guests to be filled in later, then I would be able to slip out of the party and make the tipoff. "What does he want with me?"

"Go into the lion's den and find out," Stringham brayed in that foghorn voice of his.

I pulled myself out of my comfortable chair and shuffled into the great man's office. Isaac Greenwald is a certifiable curmudgeon. Rumor has it that he'd run an expose on his own mother if it would fill a dozen empty column-inches. True, he *is* the best editor I've ever worked for, but it doesn't make up for the fact that he is an all around pain in the ass.

"You roared?" I asked as I slumped down into the purple-on-mauve chair he keeps in his office.

"You're late," he growled. "I asked to see you over a minute ago."

"Had to stop in the john," I lied.

"Do it on your own time. We pay you to be a reporter, not a coffee purifier."

"Right."

"I've got an assignment for you, Tarkington."

His calling me by my full name was his way of signaling that he was pissed about something. I couldn't think of anything I'd goofed up lately, so I decided that someone else had torqued him off and I was merely the hapless recipient of his wrath. It was just the kind of aggravation that I and my stomach could do without.

"I've already got an assignment," I said. "I'm covering the Roper-Johnson-Smythe bash tonight. Big Society event. Everyone will be there. Can't miss it."

"We'll send Lawrence. I've got something bigger for you to handle."

I groaned. Jill Lawrence was our spinsterish cooking editor and better able to handle the society page gossip than I was any day. But she didn't have tickets to the Suns game and I did.

That made me the more logical candidate.

Oh well, maybe I could rush this other job through and still make the game.

"Okay," I said. "I'm all ears."

"Never mind your physical deformities. Let's discuss your assignment."

"Shoot," I said, trying to ignore the slur.

"I'm sending you down to the Marana Power Plant. Something

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fishy is going on down there. I want you to find out what it is."

"Like what?"

"If I knew that, I wouldn't be sending you," he yelled. "The subject came up at the governor's news conference this morning. James over at Channel 3 asked him how long Marana would be down for repairs."

"Didn't know it was," I said.

"Yeah, they fell out of the power grid nearly forty hours ago. They put out a press release blaming unscheduled maintenance problems. It was in the back of yesterday's edition. Don't you read your own paper?" he asked.

"Just the sports section and the funnies," I said.

"I almost believe you. Now stop interrupting and listen. James asked the guv whether he had a comment about Marana. The guv replied that he was sure Arizona Consolidated Power was doing the best they could and that the plant would be back in operation presently."

I whistled. Our governor was the biggest publicity hound in the whole continental United States. He and ACP had had a couple of battles royal. For him to pass up a chance to attack the hated utility was completely out of character.

"Suspicious," I agreed. "But it still isn't an indication that something is wrong at the power plant. Maybe ACP has come across with a donation to the Guv's reelection campaign."

"Oh yeah? I called Melrose over at the State Power Commission. His secretary was a bit slow muffling her phone. I heard him tell her that he wasn't in. Now you know how much Jake Melrose owes this paper from the last election. Why the brushoff?"

"Okay, maybe . . . just maybe . . . you've got a point."

"The clincher: I tried to hire a plane to fly over the plant for a look. Nothing doing. The airspace around the plant is restricted for fifty miles in every direction. Air Force claims they are running an exercise on the Gila Bend gunnery range and need the extra airspace to guide jets in and out."

"So what do you want me to do?"

"Get in your car and get down there. I want a story and I want it in time for the afternoon edition."

My stomach picked that instant to give out with one of its warning twinges. "Deadlines are going to be the death of me, Boss," I said, tasting the bitter flavor of bile.

"This one certainly will if you don't make it," he growled. "Take a photographer along. Have him get some nice fisheye shots of the

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plant and the surrounding hills. You know the kind of artsy-fartsy things the publisher likes."

"Right. I'll take Watabe. He's good at that sort of thing."

"Watabe is covering a fire south of the river bed."

"Siles?"

"Two weeks vacation."

"Okay, she's a pain in the butt, but I'll take Gloria Price."

"Off covering a convention at the Coliseum."

"Who's that leave?"

"Roger Witby."

I groaned. First I'd probably have to break a date with Beth—not to mention missing the big game—and now I was being saddled with Roger Witby. "Haven't you got anyone experienced available?"

"Witby's experienced," Greenwald said. "He's worked here nearly two years now."

"Part time. Your enthusiasm for him wouldn't have anything to do with his being the publisher's nephew, would it?"

Greenwald's craggy face split in that satanic grin of his. "Could be, Tark. Besides, he's a hard worker. Take him along. He'll be out of school in a couple of weeks and you'll have the whole summer to rest up in."

"You're the boss."

I got out of Greenwald's office as quickly as I could. One thing I've learned working for him, don't stick around longer than necessary or else you'll find yourself handed some other dirty job. I wolfed down a couple of antacid pills at my desk and called Beth at the bank. She wasn't exactly heartbroken about the possibility of missing the game.

I grumbled about Witby all the way down to the garage. He's a nice enough kid, but he isn't a newsman. His eye for detail is lousy and he's constitutionally unsuited for working to a deadline. In a business where getting there thirty seconds late can mean the difference between Page One news and the Classified section, he lacks the drive to be a first-rate reporter. Not that he lacks energy. It just isn't channeled in the right direction. He only works for the paper part time during the school year to make extra money for college. In the summer he goes off to New Mexico to work for some laboratory full time. His field is engineering, but he took an elective course in photography once. So his uncle, our dear publisher, sees to it that we hire him every year.

Roger met me in the basement just as I was packing the tele-

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composer into the trunk of my car next to a portable film developer I'd requisitioned from Supply. He sauntered up with fifty pounds of camera equipment strung over both skinny shoulders. A lopsided smile split his pimply face.

"Hi, Mr. Tarkington," he said. "I see we are working together again."

"Fine, kid. Dump your stuff into the back seat and let's get moving. I want to get down to Marana and back by full dark. I've got tickets to the game tonight."

"Yes, sir."

I hated to be brusque with the kid, but I'd learned my lesson. He's the type that is as friendly as a month-old puppy. Encourage him just a little and he'd talk your head off. As it was, we were headed south on I-10 before I said two words to him. We'd come ten miles. That was the longest I'd ever heard him quiet.

"You ever seen the Marana Power Plant, kid?"

He shook his head.

"You'll find it interesting," I said. "Has a big golf ball two hundred feet in diameter sticking up out of it. They call it a containment thingamajig."

"Oh no, Mr. Tarkington."

"What?"

"A containment vessel is used on a fission plant. You know, like the old Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station west of town."

"Yeah, so?"

"A power plant like Marana has a fusion sphere where they smash the hydrogen nucleii together to release the energy of fusion. That's what the big white concrete ball is. A fusion sphere, not a containment vessel."

"What's the difference?"

"Well, the old fission plants could generate a lot of internal radioactivity. In case of an accident, some of that radiation might have been released to the environment. To prevent that from happening, they sealed the reactors inside a concrete and steel bottle—the containment vessel. A fusion plant, on the other hand, generates virtually zero radioactivity—except for the induced radiation in the structure from constant bombardment by neutrons, of course."

"Of course."

"But fusion plants need a spherical structure to focus the pressor field onto the reaction chamber where the fusion takes place. Without it you would never be able to build up sufficient pressure

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and heat to initiate the fusion reaction."

I thought about what the Kid had said. I hadn't understood a word.

"I didn't understand a word," I said.

"About what?"

"About the fusion sphere, pressor fields, *et cetera.*"

"Would you like me to start at the beginning?" he asked.

I resigned myself to a boring half hour and nodded. "But keep it short," I warned.

"Mankind tried to imitate the sun for almost forty years without success. Uncontrolled fusion was easy. We discovered that when Bikini Atoll was blown off the face of the Earth in the 1950s. But controlled fusion proved to be a stubborn goal to reach. They tried compressing superhot plasma in magnetic pinchbottles, smashing fuel ions into each other at high speed in Tokamaks, and exploding fuel pellets with lasers. They got close, but nothing ever managed to reach the breakeven point. That's where the process generates more energy than it consumes. In fact, it wasn't until Mendez invented stressfields that fusion power became practical."

"Stressfields? I've heard of them," I said.

"I should think you had," the Kid said. "It's just the biggest thing to come along since Sir Isaac Newton got bonked on the head by the apple."

I searched my memory. It seemed to me that stressfields had something to do with submarines.

"Mendez invented a means of generating a force at a distance that was wildly different from anything that had been invented previously. The force resembles a stress tensor in that it can be described by three compression components and six shear," he said, continuing what had ceased to be a conversation and had turned into a lecture. "A stresslike forcefield—stressfield for short. It was the breakthrough that engineers had been praying for in the fusion field. It made fusion plants feasible in two ways. The first bit of fallout was the pressor field. The inner surface of a fusion sphere acts as a sort of antenna, concentrating the pressor field at a spot in the center of the sphere. Pressure at that point rises to unbelievable levels. Professor Conrad at school thinks the density at the focus of a fusion sphere might be as high as in the center of a neutron star."

I nodded and made a mental note to find out what a neutron star was as soon as we got back to the office. "What was the sec-

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ond bit of fallout?"

"What?" he asked.

"You said that stressfields made fusion power possible in two ways. What was the second?"

"Oh yeah. Well the thing to remember about a pressor field is that it is very powerful. It presses inward on the fuel with a lot of force. So naturally the field also presses outward against the fusion sphere. Equal and opposite reactions, you know. If a fusion sphere were merely concrete and steel, then the outward pressure would distort it and ruin the focus. A distorted field won't boost the pressure high enough to sustain fusion.

"A different kind of stressfield is used to overcome that problem. It's more complex and is generated in the structure of the sphere to counteract the stresses set up by the pressor field. The second field stiffens the sphere and allows the first field to hold a tight focus."

"Sounds complicated," I said.

"Oh, it is! That's another reason why the fusion sphere has to be a sphere. Any other shape and the stress pattern would be too complex for even the smartest computer to compensate for."

An errant memory suddenly came floating back to me. "This stressfield is the widget they use in submarines to allow them to dive so deep?" I asked.

The Kid nodded. "Submarine pressure hulls and tank armor. They both use stressfield generators for extra strength. There's even talk of drilling a hole down through the Earth's crust and releasing an instrumented probe with a stressfield enhanced hull into the mantle."

"How interesting," I said, stifling a yawn.

"Yes, it is. But one thing that is really interesting is the correlation between the stress-strain equations and the stressfield-power curves. If you transpose a single term in the S-P curves for instance . . ."

"Kid, would you do me a favor?"

His eyes snapped back from the blank stare they'd been getting for the past several miles. "Sure thing, Mr. Tarkington."

"Let's talk about something else. My head is starting to ache."

"Pick a subject."

"Girls."

"Near and dear to my heart," he replied.

We spent the rest of the trip in enjoyable discourse concerning the proper size for a set of mammary glands. Personally, I favor

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petiteness. Roger, on the other hand, was a "bigger is better" man.

The Marana Power Plant is situated twenty-five miles to the west of the town of Marana in the foothills where the Santa Rosa Mountains meet the Roskruge Range. To get there you get off I-10 at Marana and take a two-lane highway through the abandoned mining town of Silver Bell toward the old Papago Indian Reservation.

We were only five miles out of Marana when we came to the roadblock. Two highway patrol cars sat astride the narrow ribbon of blacktop where it swooped through a steep sided cut in a hill. The two patrolmen stood around a small fire with a squad of khaki clad soldiers. The group had tin messkit cups in hand and were sipping coffee as we pulled into view.

I eased the car up to the roadblock and put my most engaging grin on my face. A cop put his cup down and walked over to the car. I rolled my window down and gave him a hearty: "Morning, Officer."

"Morning, men. Mind if I ask where you are going?"

"Sure thing, Officer. My son is a photography student at the U of A. We are out to get some shots of the wildlife. What's going on?"

"Nothing to concern yourselves with," the patrolman said. "The National Guard is on maneuvers in the hills back there and we've been asked to detour traffic. Wouldn't want any citizens injured accidentally."

"Thanks for the warning," I said. "We can snap jackrabbits and cactus wren anywhere."

"Very good, sir," the patrolman said. "If you'll just turn around, you can probably get better pictures around Picacho Peak. It's a national monument, you know. Only Civil War battle ever fought in Arizona."

"You don't say? Thanks for the advice, Officer."

I slowly backed the car down the grade until I got to a wider spot in the road. Then wheeling about, I drove off leisurely in the direction we'd come.

"I read something about the Guard being out on maneuvers," the Kid said.

I grinned and looked him in the eye for a second before turning back to my driving. "Notice those soldiers back of the police cars?" I asked.

"Yeah, so?"

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"Since when is the 101st Airborne Division part of the Arizona National Guard?"

"Oh," he said. There didn't seem much else to say. "What now?"

"We improvise. That cop reminded me of something when he mentioned Picacho Peak. I grew up in Phoenix. My father used to bring us south to do some hunting, doves mostly. If I remember correctly, there's an old rut of a road that runs from the Picacho National Monument to the north side of the Santa Rosas. If we could get to the end of it, we just might get ourselves into position for a telephoto shot of the power plant."

"Want to bet the army stops us before we get within ten miles of the place?"

"No bet," I answered.

We were both a little surprised when we pulled up to the base of a mesquite-covered hill not more than three miles from the power plant. We'd seen nothing on the twenty-five-mile ride across the desert except a couple of cottontail rabbits and a roadrunner. It was a little unnerving when we expected a helicopter to swoop down on us any second. The power plant was still out of sight from where we parked the car in a dry wash, but a short climb would remedy that problem. I helped Roger with some of his camera junk and we started off up a well-traveled path littered with organically grown cow pats.

By the time we reached the top, we were both puffing like a couple of old-fashioned steam engines. I carefully laid the big telephoto lenses I'd been carrying on a handy rock and slumped down on another to catch my breath. The Kid, with the enthusiasm of youth, continued on another fifty yards to a viewpoint from which he could see the plant.

Within seconds he came galloping back up the trail to where I sat with hands on knees, head arched forward. I had nearly managed to catch my breath as he scurried back to me and pointed downhill.

"What?" I asked, mild fire still rasping in my throat from our climb upwards.

Nothing came out of his opened mouth except ragged panting.

"Slow down and catch your breath," I counseled. The trouble with these young kids was that they had no conception of their limitations. A man could get a heart attack running up a twenty-percent grade like he'd just done.

Finally his breathing slowed a bit. "Come look at the plant!" he gasped.

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Since his comment was notably lacking in semantic content, I decided the easiest thing to do was to force my leaden legs down the trail to the lookout point.

When we got there, I knew what he meant. Below us, spread clear across a valley nearly four miles wide, was the Marana Power Plant. The ribbon of blacktop we'd been following earlier that morning wound its way down from the purple hills to the east and ended in a sea of asphalt crosshatched with neat yellow lines. Dozens of army and state vehicles were parked haphazardly around the lot. There were even a few cars sporting the distinctive red-white-and-blue paint job of a federal motorpool. Immediately in front of the parking lot was the plant's main gate with its white stucco guard shacks flanking cyclone fencing topped with barbed wire.

The plant itself was spread across a hundred acres of desert landscape. A modern steel and glass Administration Building flanked the parking lot, its green lawn and manicured flower beds in sharp contrast to the dirty brown of the surrounding desert.

Behind the office building sprawled the working parts of the plant. Outbuildings tended to be low and rambling—temporary shelters or storerooms of corrugated sheet steel. Building size increased radially inward, with two- and three-story concrete boxes occupying the middle distances. At the center of the plant stood the huge generator buildings and cooling towers.

All of these were dwarfed, however, by the giant roundness of the fusion sphere which towered over everything else in the scene except the distant mountains. Raised completely clear of the ground, it was supported every hundred feet or so around its perimeter by soaring concrete pillars that reached upwards to the sphere's equator.

It was an impressive sight made more impressive by the fact that half of it was missing.

It looked like an egg after the chicken has hatched out. The entire upper hemisphere had somehow been blown away. The evidence of the explosion lay everywhere in the form of huge jagged pieces of concrete egg-shell. Several of the buildings showed signs of extensive damage where debris had fallen. One entire wing of the Administration Building had been caved in. A jagged multiton projectile lay blackened in a deep crater in the tangled ruin of a transformer substation a mile south of the plant proper. Another chunk had created a small lake when it fell on the pipeline that supplied the plant with cooling water, smashing it

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beyond repair.

Even as my eyes surveyed the damage, my mind was writing the headline: *POWER PLANT EXPLODES: RADIOACTIVE CLOUD ENDANGERS CITY!* It was a lot to stuff onto the top of a newspaper, but it certainly told the story.

"Pulitzer Prize, here I come," I muttered.

"What?" Roger asked.

I quickly outlined how I planned to handle the story.

"You can't say that," he replied, his brow furrowing in distaste. "Fusion plants are completely clean except for a bit of neutron-induced radiation in the inner structure. Remember?"

I wet a finger and held it up in the breeze. A light wind was blowing toward us from the remains of the plant. Suddenly my skin started to crawl as though army ants were using my body as an invasion route. If there *were* a cloud, I was sitting in the middle of it right now. I ruthlessly put down the feeling of panic that wanted to send my feet scurrying back up the path and down the other side of the hill to my car.

"No cloud, huh?"

"None."

"Okay, I believe you . . ." I rubbed my hand across my scalp. I wanted to believe him. I was too young I die. ". . . Get me some nice arty shots of the debris."

"Right." He set to screwing a two-foot-long telephoto zoom lens to the body of his camera.

"How do you suppose it happened? Terrorists blow it up with dynamite?" I asked.

"No mere chemical explosive could have done *that* to a fusion sphere. Remember it has an internal stressfield to strengthen it. Only a fusion explosion in the reaction chamber could have breached it like that. Even so, it must have been a whopper. Those things are *strong*!"

He seemed to know what he was talking about, even if I didn't. So my second headline—*TERRORISTS DESTROY POWER PLANT*—died aborning. I sat for a few seconds and thought about the problem while listening to the quiet whir of the Hasselblad's automatic film advance interspersed with the clicking of the shutter.

The Kid put down the camera for a second and pointed to the perimeter fence where it passed near the base of the hill we were sitting on. "What is going on down there?"

My eyes followed his finger. A squad of soldiers was headed

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our way. They had nearly reached the base of our hill and looked to have every intention of climbing it.

"Pack up your gear and let's beat it," I said.

"Right." The Kid showed none of his usual clumsiness getting his camera equipment back into its bags. It just goes to show you that anyone can be coordinated if it's really important.

And the way that squad of troops was coming on, we didn't have any time to waste.

We beat it back over the hill and into the car before they managed to climb up the other side. At least, I didn't spot anyone moving on the upper slopes during any of my frequent glances back while sprinting down.

The passage of an anxious forty-five minutes found us back at Picacho Peak and the freeway. The only sign of the army during our daredevil drive across the desert was a distant speck of a helicopter. My heart managed to skip a couple of beats while it disappeared from view.

"How many shots did you get?" I asked the Kid as we headed back towards Phoenix.

"About a dozen," he replied.

"Okay, get them developed and we'll shoot them back to the paper at the next phone we see. Old Greenwald will be ecstatic over this!"

"Pictures are already in the tank," he said, hooking his thumb toward the trunk. We would have twelve crisp negatives to feed back to the paper with the telecomposer unit I'd packed.

"What do you think caused the explosion?" I asked, musing half to myself.

He shrugged. "It's above my level. I'll bet Professor Conrad would know."

"Who?"

"He's the professor I was telling you about. The one who lectures on fusion power systems at ASU. Word around campus is that he was a big man with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission before he got fired. It was supposed to be a big scandal."

"Too bad he isn't here," I said.

"He lives in Casa Grande," the Kid said. "Maybe we should stop and ask him."

I felt a surge of excitement as I considered the suggestion. Casa Grande was on the way back to Phoenix. A short stop to pick up background might be just the thing this exclusive story of mine needed.

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We pulled into a gas station at the junction of I-8 with I-10 and checked the phone book. Professor Conrad lived on the outskirts of town near the freeway. Glancing at my watch, I let my conscience fight a brief, sharp battle with itself. I had the basic story and could get it in well before the deadline. Yet, if I stopped for background data I might turn a mere bulletin into a story-in-depth, but only at the risk of missing the deadline. It was a cruel decision to have to make. Go with what you have or go for something better?

I decided to chance it. We could wire in the photos and the basic story from the professor's house. I'd punch the follow-up story directly into the composing computer just before the paper was due to go out to the thousands of fax units in subscriber's homes and on city street corners. It would be a tight schedule, but I thought I could pull it off.

It was a gamble worth taking. We'd be on the streets with the story while the television stations were still previewing Mrs. Roper-Johnson-Smythe and her party. It would be quite a scoop to have under my belt.

Professor Conrad lived on a two-acre ranchette constructed of red adobe slump block. Two horses cavorted in a white painted pipe corral out back. He seemed genuinely happy to see the Kid who quickly explained what we had found and handed over the negatives, still wet from the developing tank. The professor grabbed them with hands that trembled with excitement. I'm not sure he even noticed me. I stood in the doorway with the bulky telecomposer making my right arm longer than my left until I decided he wasn't going to be polite and invite me in.

So I invited myself in.

The professor was a wizened senior citizen with a wisp of whitish hair atop a freckled balding dome. At the moment, his frosty blue eyes were devouring the negatives which he held up to the light of the living room window.

"Mind if I use the phone, Professor?" I asked.

He ignored me, intent on drinking in the pictures. I picked up the phone and began dialing a credit card call to the paper.

By the time I'd outlined the situation to Greenwald, the professor had put down the pictures. His face was etched in deep worry lines. I wondered if he had stock in Arizona Consolidated Power. He was probably trying to figure out how to dump his shares before the story broke. I gently took the pictures from him and fed them into the wirephoto slot on the composer. Within a few sec-

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onds it had gulped them down and spewed them out through the telephone connection to the paper's master-composing computer. I told Greenwald to put the paper on hold until he heard from me. He told me to go to hell. I pleaded with him. He informed me that the deadline was less than an hour away in words of no more than four letters. I glanced at my watch and did some swearing of my own. Where did the time go?

If the phone had had a vision attachment I would have gotten down on my knees and begged. As it was, I put on my most convincing voice and pleaded with Greenwald to hold the paper as long as he could. There was dead silence on the other end for half a minute and then he agreed. I knew by the tone of his voice that my career was on the line.

I hung up the phone and held out my hand to Professor Conrad. "Hi, I'm Ed Tarkington. People call me Tark. Glad to meet you, Professor."

He seemed to snap out of his trance long enough to introduce himself.

"I understand you're quite an expert on fusion plant pressor systems," I said.

"I know something about them," he agreed.

"Mind telling us what happened to this one?"

"I'm not sure I should," he replied. "I should check with Washington first."

"From what I hear, Professor, you have every reason to dislike the Nuclear Regulatory Commission."

He grimaced. "I can't deny it."

"Then you have no reason to protect them if they are at fault in this Marana accident. Why *did* you quit the NRC, Professor?"

"I had a technical disagreement with my bosses over a specific safety system for fusion power plants. I thought it was necessary, they didn't. I'm out of a job . . ." He picked up the roll of negatives and waved it around. ". . . these prove my ex-bosses soon will be."

"That's the spirit!" I said. "Tell us what happened and we'll spread those Washington bureaucrats over every front page in the country."

"You don't know how true that statement is," he muttered almost to himself.

"Come on, Professor, give!"

"I'd better check on something first," he said, going to the phone. He picked it up and dialed a 202 area code. I'd telephoned the capitol enough to recognize the code for Washington, D.C.

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After a minute's wait he got someone's secretary on the phone and had a brief argument with her. It seemed her boss was in conference and couldn't be disturbed. But the professor wasn't to be denied. Within another minute, the unidentified boss was on the other end of the line. From that point on, all we heard was one-half the conversation. I'd have given a year's pay to hear the other half.

Professor: "Is that you, Ferd? . . . Yeah, long time no see . . . What happened to Marana, Ferd?"

There was a longish pause while the buzzing sound of an angry voice on the other end of the line filtered out to my straining ears. I couldn't understand what was said, but the emotional content came through loud and clear.

Professor: "Never mind how I found out. Was it an implosion accident?"

Another longish pause. This time, though, there was silence on the other end and when the voice resumed, the waspish buzz seemed much more subdued.

Professor: "Never mind the excuses, Ferd. What did the radiation detectors record? . . . Uh huh, I thought so . . . It was a point source, I assume . . . Okay, thanks for the info, Ferd . . . Yeah, I'm sorry too. Goodbye."

He replaced the phone in its cradle and slumped into an easy chair. Where he had had the manner of a fighting bantam before the call, he suddenly looked like nothing more than a tired old man. Something about the call had taken the will to fight right out of him.

"What is an implosion accident, Professor?" I asked as gently as I could.

He looked at me, pity in his eyes. "A theoretical resonance of the pressor field brought on by a phase shift in the generator's power source. It would tend to increase the energy level of the field to inconceivable levels for an instant before burning out the field generator. It would also overwhelm the stressfield stabilization system in that instant. That's what caused the explosion of the fusion sphere. The reaction force produced by the sudden surge in the pressor field literally tore the top off."

The Kid looked puzzled. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"A resonance in the pressor field, Professor Conrad? I don't understand how that would be possible."

The professor looked at him. "You've learned your lessons well, Roger. Calling it a resonance is a bit sloppy, but that is the most

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analogous phenomenon I can think of. A sudden power spik builds up in the field, as in any system in resonance. I warne those fools in Washington that it might happen someday. I tol them we needed better phase control of the generator systems, bu they wouldn't listen. They just couldn't believe my figures wer correct. Well now they'll have to believe me. I'll be vindicated fo all the good it will do me."

"So we lose a fifty-billion-dollar power plant because the big wigs at the NRC wouldn't listen to someone who knew about th problem years ago?" I asked. I felt a burst of exhilaration. It wa a dynamite story, far more than I could ever have hoped for!

"We lose a lot more than that," the professor said. "The reso nance probably formed a Schwarzschild Discontinuity in the reac tion chamber. That's why I asked about radiation. As the discon tinuity pulls in additional matter, it emits very hard radiation The automatic recorders detected a pattern of radiation nearly like that which I predicted would occur after such an accident."

"A Schwarzschild Discontinuity, Professor?" Roger asked perplexed. "Do you mean a Black Hole?"

The professor nodded.

Now I was confused. I wasn't a complete dunce when it came to technical matters. A Black Hole was something the astronomers talked about. If I remembered correctly, it was the nothingness left over when a giant star collapsed in upon itself, taking all its matter and light with it. How such a thing could be associated with a terrestrial power plant was a bit unclear to me. I asked the professor.

"You are right as far as you go, Tarkington. A Black Hole is formed when a star several times larger than the sun runs out of fuel. The star is no longer able to fight the pull of gravity and collapses in upon itself. The internal pressure rises so high that even the neutrons of the atomic nucleus are squeezed out of existence. The pull of gravity in such an object is so powerful that light itself cannot escape, and thus the hole is formed. But a hole doesn't *have* to be created by the collapse of a massive sun. One will form anywhere the pressure exceeds the structural strength of a neutron.

"That is exactly what happened at Marana. The microscopic focus of the pressor field normally compresses heavy hydrogen fuel to a density where the protons and neutrons are crammed together and made to undergo fusion. The resonant condition raised that pressure at the focus considerably—just for the barest

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ıanosecond—and that pressure collapsed the fuel atoms into a 3lack Hole."

"And this Black Hole thing is still inside the Marana reactor?" asked.

"Oh, heavens no," the professor said, mopping droplets of sweat rom his brow with a white handkerchief. "It has weight and it lropped onto the ground as soon as it formed. That is a bit inac-ırate. It dropped into the ground, consuming any matter that got n its way. At first only single atoms or even chunks of nucleii vere pulled in. But as it consumes matter, it gets endlessly larger ınd better able to consume even more matter. I imagine the effect s exponential in its progress."

"You mean this thing is gobbling up chunks of ground even as ve sit here? That it is getting bigger every passing second?"

He nodded. I noticed Roger was getting green around the gills. 3eing technically trained, he must have already jumped to the ıame conclusion the professor had.

"How do we get rid of this thing?" I asked. "It sounds danger-ıus."

"It is," the professor replied. "And there's no getting rid of it. Whatever matter crosses the Schwarzschild Radius—that is the ıoundary around the hole where a body must exceed the speed of ight to escape—is gone forever. You can never get it back."

"I remember an article in *Reader's Digest* when I was ten or ıleven," the Kid said. "It was all about Black Holes. I remember t saying that a hole that fell to Earth would consume the entire ılanet, leaving the Moon to circle around an empty spot in space. Can you imagine the feelings of an astronaut on the Moon watch-ng the Earth disappear a bit at a time? It gives me the creeps ust thinking about it."

His creeps were nothing compared to the chill that ran down ny back.

"Are you saying the Earth is going to be destroyed because of a 3lack Hole created in the Marana Power Plant explosion?" I ısked, half afraid of the answer I would get.

There was a long silence in which the Professor chewed on his ower lip and thought of a way to say it. Finally, he merely nod-led. The mute gesture conveyed more meaning than any hour ong oration could ever have done.

What do you say in answer to a man who has just told you your vorld is going to be destroyed? What emotions are you supposed o feel?

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I gently probed my psyche. It was funny, but I didn't feel anything at first. It was as if he'd told me rain was predicted for tomorrow. Even my ulcer had stopped its fire dance for the moment. The news was just too much to comprehend in one gulp, I guess. Then I did feel an emotion taking hold of me. Surprisingly, it was not fear or anything akin to it. If anything, it came closest to excitement. This was the big break I had been waiting all my life to get. It was the biggest story in the history of the world, and it would have my byline on it.

It would be the scoop of all time!

Breathlessly, I pumped the professor for details. It was like pulling teeth. His answers were monotone and monosyllabic. I prodded him mercilessly for a layman's explanation of his theory. He responded reluctantly, wasting valuable time.

Eventually, I had enough of a sketch of what had happened to file my story. I looked at my watch. It was nearly three-thirty—only half an hour left. At four o'clock sharp, the composing computer shot the paper out to the fax machines and a waiting world.

And my story had to be loaded into the computer at least two minutes before that happened.

I spent the next fourteen minutes feverishly writing out the story on a yellow pad of paper, scribbling as quickly as I could without leaving a scrawl that even I couldn't read. Every second that slipped past burned itself into my consciousness. Why is there never enough time? I should have had eight or ten hours to polish the story into a thing of beauty. Instead I had fourteen minutes.

I hurriedly dialed Greenwald's number when I'd given it all the time I could afford. He picked up the phone on the first ring, a sure sign that he'd chewed his fingernails to the elbow. I talked fast and furiously. The power plant disaster story which would have been my lead would have to be relegated to the second page. I had something far bigger for page one. I didn't have time for a long winded argument, so I just gave him the bare facts.

Dead silence came out of the phone. Finally a hoarse whisper came on the line. "Are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure. I've got two experts here."

"You had better be," he said.

"Clear the computer," I yelled. The phone was cradled on my shoulder while I used both hands to plug in the telecomposer. The labored breathing on the other end of the line finally emitted a single word:

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"Cleared."

Then I began to type. I started with my headline—*ACCIDENT OOMS PLANET!* I punched for four-centimeter type after discovering the paper wasn't set up for a six-centimeter headline. ven so, it would catch the public's eye. Next I started in on my rst paragraph:

ASA GRANDE—An accident at the Arizona Consolidated ower Company's Marana generating station has doomed he Earth to extinction, it was learned today. rofessor Joseph Conrad of the Arizona State niversity engineering staff stated that the accident hich destroyed the power plant (story and pictures on age 2) created a Black Hole which will expand to levour the entire Earth in time. Professor Conrad, a ormer NRC scientist, bases his opinion on . . .

My fingers flew over the keys as they've never flown before. nspiration settled on me like a cloud. I typed three columns of tory in a little less than ten minutes. Within five minutes, sweat tarted dripping from my face and arms. My knees began to shake nd my back cramped from nervous tension. But my hands lanced across the keyboard of the composer sure and steady. I ouldn't afford a mistake. My input was going directly into the omputer. Usually the stories went on tape for the proofreaders to olish up before inputting, but not today. This was one story that would come out exactly as I had written it. It would be my work nd no one else's.

Suddenly, I was through. The last green character flashed on he composer's screen. I typed the final -30- and saw the yellow ight flash to indicate the computer was loaded. I let my arms lrop to my sides. Relieved of their duty, they began to shake uncontrollably. The Kid picked up the phone and talked to Greenwald. I didn't hear what was said. I was too emotionally and physically drained to take an interest. I had just written the story of ny life. I had won the Boston Marathon, climbed Mount Everest, nd made love to a dozen screen goddesses all at once.

I had turned out the greatest story any newsman has ever written.

I was fulfilled at last.

I don't know how long a time went by before my eyes refocused. didn't really care. The feeling of accomplishment washed me in

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languor. A gentle lassitude similar to what the womb must have felt like held me in its grip. I sat unseeing and enjoyed the feeling for a few precious seconds or minutes. But all good things must come to an end and life must go on.

For awhile, anyway.

I wondered if I still had time to get back to Phoenix in time for the basketball game. It would be nice to see Beth one last time. Maybe getting married again wasn't such a bad idea after all. Even Irene, my ex, and I had had our good moments. I wondered if there would be time for spring to come again before the dark maw below my feet ended everything. The thought jarred me back to reality.

I cursed myself royally. The excitement of the story must have hypnotized me like a mouse before a snake. The sheer immensity of it all must have affected me far more than I'd thought. Here I was contemplating the possibility of winning the last Pulitzer Prize and I'd pulled the dumbest cub reporter trick in the book. Of the five big 'W's of reporting, I'd completely forgotten the *When*! Nowhere in my story had I mentioned how long the world had to live.

"Say, Professor, how long has the world got before the Black Hole eats it?" I asked. I wondered if I had time to amend my story before the paper went out on the wire.

The professor looked off into space for a minute and shook his head. "I'm not sure. The problem is a difficult one."

"How so?"

"Well, not knowing how big the hole was to start with, or the density of the strata through which it has dropped, or the pressure forcing matter across the Schwarzschild Radius . . . No, there are too many unknowns. And there is the problem of how much of the Earth must be consumed before the catastrophic earthquakes come. It shouldn't be very long, I fear."

"Couldn't we make some worst-case assumptions?" the Kid asked. "Assume the hole has attained a mass of a hundred million metric tons in the two days since it was formed and that it has dropped to the very center of the Earth. Then assume a linear rate of mass increase with time, or possibly a rate that increases with the square root of two exponentially."

The professor nodded. "It ought to give us a ballpark estimate, I would think. The mass will give us the Schwarzschild Radius and thus the surface area. We can treat the hole as a three-dimensional orifice and use Bernoulli's fluid flow equation to find the

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mass gain."

He sat down at the desk in the corner and began to tap on the computer console lying on top of the dark mahogany. He quickly worked his fingers across the keys, setting up the problem. Roger was kept busy looking up physical parameters in the Handbook of Chemistry and Physics that the professor kept on a bookshelf over the desk.

I occupied myself with looking at my watch and praying they would hurry it up. Four o'clock was nearly upon us.

The professor tapped one last key and the answer was displayed on the computer screen. He frowned and began tapping again. This time the answer took a little longer to appear.

The frown was etched deeper into his face. I looked at my watch and began to wonder if I even had time to finish a cup of coffee before the end came. The professor worked the problem a third time. As the third answer flashed onto the screen, he turned around to face me. There was a strange look in his eyes.

I searched my brain for an instant before finding a label to put on the look. I decided it was a combination of sheepishness and relief.

"Well?" Both Roger and I echoed.

"Gentlemen, I seem to have overlooked something. A hole on a substellar scale is an extremely tiny object. In fact, one massing a hundred million tons would have a diameter only one-hundredth that of an electron. And such a tiny hole is so small that it would take virtually forever to force even a single additional pound of matter across the Schwarzschild Radius."

"What are you saying, Professor?" I asked, a sick feeling welling up in the pit of my stomach.

"From my calculation, Mr. Tarkington, I must conclude that the Marana Black Hole could never attain such a mass. In fact, I would be greatly surprised if it weighed more than a single kilogram at birth. And that brings up another complication."

"What?" I groaned.

"Small Black Holes tend to be unstable. They will eventually disintegrate, releasing all their stored energy back into the universe. At least, that's the accepted theory. A hole's lifetime is a function of the cube of its mass. If the Marana Hole had massed 10^{11} kilograms—a hundred million tons—then its lifetime would be three million years. But a mere kilogram-size hole, that's another story. It would be formed in the explosion and then wink out of existence less than 10^{-19} seconds later. Therefore I must

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conclude that it no longer exists . . . indeed, if it ever existed at all."

"If it ever existed at all?" I screamed.

"We are talking about a scale of 10^{-18} angstroms. I am not at all sure that Mendez's Theorem holds true on the scale where quantum mechanics is operative. I will have to give the idea some serious thought."

"But the hole *must* exist," I said. "They detected radiation coming from it . . . didn't they?"

He shrugged. "It must have been coming from another source."

What do you say when you find out the world isn't going to be destroyed after all? What emotions are you supposed to feel? Joy? Thankfulness? Love for your fellow creatures who have been miraculously saved? My emotions came nowhere near any of these. My feelings could be summarized by a single word:

Panic!

The Earth would die of old age after all and I'd just filed a story that said it was doomed. I'd used a headline four centimeters high to say it. And worst of all—it was due to hit the wire any minute now.

I punched Greenwald's number frantically into the phone. I had to kill that story before it went out. I'd be the laughing stock of every reporter in town . . . hell, in the whole country . . . if it ever saw print.

Somewhere in the house a clock started to chime. It struck four times as I listened to Greenwald's telephone ring in my ear. A few seconds later another sound began at my elbow. It was a sound I knew well.

The telefax machine in the corner had begun churning out the afternoon paper.

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A THIRST FOR BROKEN WATER

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by Jo Clayton
art: Karl B. Kofoed

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An earlier adventure of Gleia appeared in the February 1979 issue of this magazine. The author, a native Californian, now lives and teaches in New Orleans. Her hobbies include photography and solo backpacking, and she is fatally addicted to reading.

In late spring a mammal came among the seaborn on Cern Myamar, walking quietly behind Temokeuu the Shipmaster. At Midsummer Eve the conchs were blown to announce her formal adoption into Temokeuu's clan, though there were some who opposed this. After the horning Jaydugar swung twice around the double sun while Gleia lived those 2100 days as Temokeuu's daughter, enduring for Temokeuu's sake the first scandal and hostility until her quiet ways won a place for her and she found a few friends.

Two thousand, one hundred days. The ice came and retreated twice. On the mainland, the tribes drove their armor-plated yd'rwe in great loops across the two thousand stadia of grassland and back again to their winter places in valleys heated by scattered hotsprings, fighting their magic wars on both arcs, ceasing only at the tradefair where the Caravanners came to buy meat and sell their wares. And the Caravanners made their spring and summer rounds twice, rumbling along their trade roads and in their mountain valleys where the Parshi farming clans twice harvested their crops and three times celebrated Thawsend. As did the other diverse members of mankind scattered about the world. In little pockets everywhere the descendants of a thousand ships that came crashing down on the man-trap world struggled with legend and nature back to a nine-tenths forgotten technology. And Gleia began to grow restless as the third thaw came and spring brought warmth and growth to the land again.

Jevati touched the honor medals dangling over her flat chest. "I think he'll die today."

"I didn't . . ." The sail began luffing the moment Gleia pulled her eyes off the telltales. Her mouth clamped shut. The breeze was maddeningly unreliable, while her patience seemed to have deserted her with the winter ice. A twitch of the tiller filled the white triangle belly-taut again.

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Behind them Horli's giant bulge was a velvet crimson half-circle above the jagged line of Cern Myamar's central ridge. She risked a glance at her friend. Jevati stirred, Horli's light sliding like bloody water over the delicate angles of her face. "Keep on this tack much longer and we'll be in the Dubur's Teeth," she said.

Gleia tightened her fingers on the tiller bar, suppressing her irritation, uncomfortably aware that she was over-reacting to nearly everything these days. "Watch your head." The boom came sliding across in a smoothly controlled jibe, skimming just above the seaborn's tight blue curls. The sail filled again and the *Dragonfish* began gliding along the port tack.

"Nice." Jevati straightened. "For a mammal."

"Fish!" After a minute Gleia said, "You look better."

Jevati tugged at the son-honor. "It was a hard birth." Her hand fell into her lap, fingers pleating her fishskin swimtrunks. "It'll be a long time before I go through that again. I'm sorry the old man's dying, but I don't want another of his wigglers." She lifted her head and let the breeze blow drops of water across her face.

Gleia frowned at the fluttering telltales, more worried than she cared to admit by her friend's frailty. "You're not much more than a wiggler yourself," she said. "If you don't marry again, what are you going to do?"

"Wiggler!" Jevati slapped at the rail in disgust, then shook her head. "I don't know. Depends." Her fingers moved back and forth along the rail. "I have to survive the Widowjourney before I make plans."

The red sun was giving the air a real warmth even this early in the day. Thaw was over and the long summer was finally more than a memory frozen in the ice of deep winter. Jevati let the silence build between them, comfortable with it—unlike Gleia who worried at what she'd heard. *Widowjourney? Survive? Should she ask or let it rest?* The breeze teased tendrils of brown hair from the leather thong she used as a tieback and whipped them about her ears. Even after six standard years with the seaborn she still came upon occasions when she was uncertain about what she should do. She sighed and surrendered to her curiosity. "Widowjourney?"

"Home to Cern Radnavar." Jevati stretched, delighting in the feel of the wind and spray playing over her body. "Thanks for getting me out of that tomb. I was about ready to escape through the underways."

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"Firstwife didn't like my coming around. I thought she was going to snap my head off."

Jevati sniffed. "Firstwife Zdarica never has approved of me." She grinned. "Matter of fact, I don't know what she does approve of." Her mother-of-pearl teeth glinted crimson like small bloody needles as they caught and gave back Horli's light. "Idaguu's woman-ridden. I've always wondered how he got up enough nerve to add another wife to his household. Temokeuu-your-father is a man of sense. Only one soft little mammal to tease him."

"Jevati!"

Jevati stopped giggling and looked wistfully at her webbed fingers. "I'd give this hand to be you."

"Head down." Gleia eased the boat into the final tack that would take them into the mouth of the small bay at Cernsha Shirok, the volcanic island lying across the mouth of the bay. "Why'd you marry him? Sixth wife. You must have known how that would be."

"My clan owed Idaguu a lot of money. From the time our own Cern blew its top and we had to move to Radnavar. He was Shipmaster and Council head then and tighter than a starving suckerfish." She scratched absently at the skin on her knee. "He came to Radnavar to arrange for payment and there I was. He liked what he saw and took me instead of the pile of oboloi that would have beggared the clan." She arched her body, bending her head back until her skull rested against the rail, cushioned by the springy blue hair that wasn't hair at all but a complex sense organ. "It wasn't so bad. He was nice enough to me. But old. And the other wives . . . well, they are all from Myamar clans and I was an outsider." She straightened, smiled at Gleia. "Till you came I was lonely as a schoolless herring. There's not much news from Radnavar." She waved a hand to the south. "It'll be good to see my people again. If I survive the swim."

"Get the sail, will you?" Gleia's voice was sharper than she intended. Jevati's nose wrinkled again, but she uncleated the halyard and let the sail slide down. As the boat rocked gently in the calm waters of the bay, Gleia examined the seaborn's bland face. "What did you mean by that?" she said.

"What?" Jevati walked her fingers along her thigh muscle, apparently absorbed in the small dents they made in her flesh.

"Idiot! You said it twice. If you survive the swim."

"Oh. Nothing much." She pushed herself onto her knees and looked over the side. "Want me to let Vlevastu know you're here?"

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Gleia pulled the tie from her hair and ran her hands through the curly mass. "Little fish, sometimes . . ."

Eyes twinkling, Jevati settled back in the bottom of the boat. "Gleia, Gleia, you make it so easy I can't resist, I have to tease you."

Gleia wiggled her fingers suggestively. "You forget your little weakness. Talk, wiggler, or I—"

"About what?" Jevati opened her eyes wide in exaggerated innocence then shrieked as Gleia raked fingers across her too-prominent ribs. "Truce," she squealed. She pushed at Gleia's hands and lifted herself on an elbow.

"Truce."

When she caught her breath, Jevati shifted out of her awkward crouch to a more comfortable position leaning against the side of the boat. "After all, it's not so funny for me. Widowjourney. Simple. When Idaguu dies, his wives must go back to their birth clans."

"I don't see . . ." Gleia rubbed her hand across her forehead. "What's the problem?"

"Obiachai. I've got to make it on my own." She slid her shoulders against the side, her glassy scales moving with a papery sound over the wood. "If I make it, fine. If not, too bad."

"Obiachai!" Gleia clenched her hands into fists. "I'm sick of that word. When Temokeuu brought me here that's all I heard. Obiachai! That's the way things have to be done because that's the way they've always been done. It's a matter of clan honor. Don't disgrace us. You can't do that. Hunh!"

"Yelling doesn't help."

Gleia sucked in a breath and blew it out again. "You're right, still . . . I really must be dim this morning."

"You are. Where's Cern Radnavar?"

"Huh?"

Jevati nodded gravely. "I thought so. Listen and learn, little mammal." She paused then spoke in an exaggerated singsong chant, "Cern Radnavar swims six hundred stadia south." She laughed at the disgust in Gleia's face. "Two weeks swim in untamed water. Now do you see?"

"Why can't Temokeuu give you passage on one of his chismakkas when they go trading south? He won't worry about being paid."

"You're not listening. Obiachai. He'd be exiled if he tried to help me."

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"That's stupid."

"That's the way things are." She took hold of the mast and pulled herself onto her feet. "Vlevastuu obviously doesn't know you're here. Temokeuu won't want to wait for his breakfast melons." She slid over the side and disappeared into the depths of the bay.

Gleia paced restlessly along the edge of the water, her cafta brushing against salt flowers and trailing kan-kaolis. This room was built out over the harbor and took in a portion of the shoreline. The roof was checkered with panels of translucent kala shell, letting in enough light to keep the plants growing and healthy and was supported by rough beams of twisted sinaubar wood expensively imported from the mainland. This was Temokeuu's study, his particular retreat. No one came here except by invitation and he seldom invited intrusion. Gleia was the single exception to this rule. He watched her prowl about for a while then looked down at the papers in front of him.

"Seems god-Meershah speared another starfish."

Gleia dropped onto a bench. "Translation please."

"A starship came down in the sea by Cern Vrestar. Jaydugar has gathered to herself another branch of mankind."

Gleia smiled. "The Madarmen would say the Madar saw man-corrupt and plucked him from his wicked ways as she did my Parshi and your seafolk and all the other sorts. Plucked them from their evil paradises and set them here to be men again by the labor of their hands."

Temokeuu leaned back in his chair and smiled affectionately at her. "You don't sound much of a believer."

"They caught me too late. The streets taught me to believe more in my own hands and feet." She chuckled. "And teeth." She jumped up and came to stand beside him, one hand on his shoulder. "Those are reports from Tetaki?"

"Mmh. As you see. He says the starfolk are starting to clean out the ashes from the houses on Vrestar. Apparently they're land dwellers."

"Mammals?"

"He doesn't say." Temokeuu turned over the top sheet. "They're small, dressed in grey coveralls." His long slender forefinger touched a few lines of writing. "With tails they can use like another hand." He sighed and looked worried. "He says he's going to try talking to them." He picked up a stylus and began

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twisting it through his fingers.

Gleia felt his muscles tensing and smoothed her hands over his shoulders. "He'll be all right. He's as tough and wily a trader as his father." Temokeuu laughed and patted her hand. "I'm not flattering you and you know it," she said. She moved away from him and began prowling about, feeling more restless than ever. "I was talking to Jevati this morning."

"Oh?"

"It's idiotic to send a frail child all that way alone."

"Obiachai." He set the stylus beside the pile of papers and watched her stalk about, kicking at the hem of her cafta until it belled out around her body. "All this isn't just for Jevati, is it? I've watched you growing more restless as the winter passed."

Gleia threw herself back down on the bench. "I don't know. I have everything anyone should want. I've been happy here."

"Been?"

She ran her hands through her hair until it was a wild tangle. "I think I'm spoiled for peace." She looked helplessly at him. "I'd be a fool to leave and I'd miss you terribly, Temokeuu-my-father."

He pressed his hands on the desk top. "Most of the seaborn prefer the quiet order of the Cerns. But some of us have a taste for broken water." Amusement lit his eyes and his mouth twisted into a rare smile. "I understand you better than you think, Gleia-my-daughter."

She sat up, suddenly alert.

He touched the pile of papers in front of him. "I want you to find Tetaki and see what he's doing. These . . ." He tapped his fingers in the center of the pile of reports. "These are several weeks old." Then he turned grave eyes on her. "This will be your home when you need it again, Gleia-my-daughter, but now you need to try the broken water." He was silent a long minute. "I'll have the *Dragonfish* provisioned for you. There's no hurry. You might take the long way round, stop at Radnavar before you head out to Vrestar."

She flung her head back, bubbling with excitement. "I told my little fish you were the wisest of men."

His smile flashed again. "Not wise, Gleia-my-daughter, merely old in much foolishness." Then he sobered. "Don't talk about this other thing. As far as anyone will know, you're out to see Tetaki. Jevati can do what she pleases about joining you. I don't think you'll have to warn her not to discuss her intentions." He walked over to her and smoothed down the wild spikes she'd clawed into

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her hair. "I want you free to come home."

Gleia paced over the sand, looking repeatedly out toward the tall fingers of rock that poked through the seawater at irregular intervals. The barrier pillars. Horli was a bead of fire between two black fingers, turning wisps of fog into crimson smoke. She turned and trudged back up the slope to the beached *Dragonfish*. This was her second day of waiting and she was beginning to worry.

Horli drifted higher and Hesh poked up his deadly blue head. As a few clouds scooted amiably across a sky that already shimmered with heat, Gleia tucked the ends of her headcloth into the binding cord, dug her toes in the sand and hugged her knees against her chest.

The suns crept higher. Wavelets began lapping at the boat's stern. Shading her eyes with her hands, she searched the water until tears streamed down her cheeks and black spots danced like new-hatched teypolei in front of her. She rubbed her eyes. *A whole day late. Damn it's hot.* Jerking the headcloth off, she dropped it into the boat and waded out to where the water was waist deep. One last time she looked around then plunged under and came up sputtering but feeling a little cooler.

"Gleia . . . Gleia . . ."

Behind her, closer to the beach, Jevati crouched on her knees, the shallow water washing around her body. Gleia waded to her and helped the trembling seaborn stand. Together they stumbled up the gentle slope to the patch of shade developing at the foot of the cliff. Jevati collapsed, arms dangling limply, resting her head on her raised knees. A few drops of blood oozed from a cut on one arm, leaking around a fine membrane that held the torn flesh together. After a few minutes the harsh explosions of breath grew softer. She raised her head and leaned carefully back against the shaded rock.

"What happened?" Gleia touched the small webbed hand quivering on the sand. When Jevati shook her head, still sucking in great gulps of warm air, she said, "Take your time, little fish."

They sat quietly in the widening patch of shade, enjoying a companionable silence as Jevati's strength gradually came back. The tide rose until the water's edge was a short distance past the *Dragonfish*. The little boat began to rock in time with the beat of the waves.

Jevati sucked in a deep breath, pushed up onto her knees and

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scanned the horizon, relaxing only when she saw nothing but the bright expanse of water foaming about the silent barrier pillars.

Gleia watched. "What's wrong?"

"Can you launch the boat now?"

"It's coming up high heat. Are you strong enough?"

"We can't stay here."

As soon as she had *Dragonfish* running southeast on a broad reach Gleia settled back and fixed her eyes on Jevati. "What happened? How'd you get that wound on your arm?"

Eyes half-closed, stretched out comfortably in the bottom of the boat, Jevati smiled sleepily. "Nag, nag."

Gleia sniffed. "What happened?"

"Well, after they locked the doors against me, I walked down to the bay and started out." She looked past Gleia, frowning slightly. "The strangest feeling. Like the whole city was empty. Even the bay was empty." She yawned suddenly. "Ohhyayy, I'm tired. I could sleep a week."

"Jevati!"

The seaborn stroked her throat slowly. "I was just passing Cernsha Sharoo, surface swimming for a change, when a miserable rat-eaten dhoura came round the end. I swam right under the bow and some idiot tried to harpoon me."

"What!"

"You're surprised!" She giggled and shook her head. "You should have seen me. He creased my arm and scared me stiff. I mean really stiff. Damn if he didn't pull in the barb and try again. Missed me completely that time. But I was bleeding and sending out signals for every blood sniffer within a dozen stadia. I got myself onto the island just in time to avoid being eaten by a cheksa." She looked down at her arm, touched the film on the wound with a fingertip. "By the time this was set they'd spotted me. I could hear them yelling. I went deep, found a ledge to rest on. Spent the night there. As soon as Horli stuck her head up, I was coming here fast as I could."

About mid-afternoon Jevati yawned and sat up. "Where are we?"

"Past Cliffsend."

Jevati looked out to sea. There was a dark smudge low on the eastern horizon. She signed. "Cern Vrestar," she said. "The cone is still smoking after six thaws."

"Temokeuu told me . . ." Jevati's gasp interrupted her. The sea-

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born was staring past her. Gleia glanced back and saw the top half of a triangular sail. As she watched, the sail grew until most of the dhoura was visible. She heard a splash and swung around. Jevati was over the side, gone deep in her panic. Gleia turned *Dragonfish* and raced toward the line of barrier pillars. The water inside was too shallow for the dhoura and the spaces between pillars too narrow to admit the sea-goer. She turned into the wind and waited.

Jevati came out of the water and thumped into the boat dripping copious slathers of water into the bottom. "Sorry," she said. "That thing scares me."

Gleia laughed. "I'd say you had reason." She watched the sail grow larger as the dhoura came dipping toward them, riding the brisk wind that ruffled the water into lightly foaming peaks. "Think they saw us?"

"Probably."

"Well, better safe than fast." She let the sail fill. "Unless you have a deadline."

"No." Jevati looked a little wistfully at the smudge darkening the sky in the east. "Maybe we could see Vrestar first once the dhoura's past."

The dhoura came even with them about an hour later, then pulled ahead. In the west, Horli's bottom edged behind the inland mountains. Hesh had moved a double finger-width across her middle and was sitting close to her left side, still several hours from touching down. Gleia looked at Jevati, raised her eyebrows. "Still want to go?"

Jevati nodded. "Wait a bit longer," she said. "The dhoura's too fast and too close."

As they watched the dhoura move ahead, five discs came out of the smoke smudge and hovered above the ship. Like large black coins. Gleia glanced at Jevati. "I've never seen anything like that before."

"Me either." Jevati crouched in the bow, watching as the discs circled slowly over the ship. "The dhoura's in trouble. Look at the way the sail is jerking."

As they watched, three of the discs sank until they were behind the pillars and out of sight. The fourth continued to hover. The fifth came darting toward them. Jevati gasped and went overside again. Gleia swung the *Dragonship* around and raced for the shore.

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She blinked and sat up. Her head throbbed. She clutched at her temples and groaned.

"Here." A man's voice. She jerked around, then squeezed her eyes shut as the dull pain drilled through her brain. A hand closed around her wrist and pulled her arm down. She felt her fingers close around cold metal. With his hand covering hers, supporting her, she lifted the cup to her lips and gulped down several swallows of the warm, stale water. Then he took the cup away. "Sit still a minute and the pain will lessen." She heard him stand and move off.

After a few minutes she opened her eyes, reluctantly convinced that she would live. The pain was still there but it had subsided to a dull ache, like that of a rotten tooth. She looked around. They were alone in a small bare cabin. There was a bunk bed built into one wall with a second berth stacked above it. In the far wall a small square porthole let some light creep through but shut out any fresh air. The man was perched on the end of the lower bunk watching her.

He was thinnish and pale with a tangled thatch of hair so red it was a shriek of fire in the half light. His eyes were pale, a nearly colorless grey. Maybe green or blue. She couldn't tell which. They changed as she watched. His face was a stubble-shadowed blunt triangle with clean-cut angles as neat and delicate as Jevati's. He sat with long legs pulled up, long narrow hands resting on his knees. His jacket had wide sleeves, the ends cut in square scallops. Bright bluegreen outside, dark yellow lining. Dark blue pants skin tight, disappearing into knee-high boots. The top hung open, showing a wedge of pale, well-muscled chest.

Moving cautiously, Gleia used the side of the bunk to pull herself up. "How'd I get here?" She swallowed and leaned against the door. "Where am I anyway?"

"The thissik brought you." She looked blank. "The disc riders. This is Korl's *Cuttlefish*."

"A dhoura?"

He watched her a moment, pale chatoyant eyes touching her face and fisted hands. Then he nodded.

"Was I brought in alone?" She waited tensely then relaxed as he nodded once more. Jevati had got away, thank the Madar. "Who are you?"

"Shounach the juggler." His mouth curled into a sudden broad smile. He turned his hands over, cupped and swayed them up and down until she almost saw the bright balls circling above them.

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Then they dropped back on his knees. "You?"

"Gleia." A large shoulderbag made of a shiny green material sprinkled with red and blue stars sat on her end of the bed. She lifted the surprisingly heavy thing to the floor and sank down in its place. "What's going on?"

"Better just wait to see what happens."

"Not many choices available to us." She sighed and settled back. "I gather we're captives."

The sky was dark with black smoke burping out of the cone in scattered lazy puffs. The waters of the bay swallowed the drifting smuts and occasionally spat back surges of gas. Gleia tried to breathe shallowly as she followed the sullen scowling crewmen off the dhoura onto the short pier near the last of the clanhouses built around the inner arch of the bay. She shivered as she looked around at the tormented earth. No wonder Vrestar's seaborn had abandoned their holding. The houses were drowned in a pale ash that grew deeper as the wings of the arc approached the center, where congealed lava rose in waves around the tortured lumps that marked the council hall and the high market.

Their thissik captors prodded them toward the Endhouse. It was already dug clear of the ash. Further on, Gleia could see small gangs of men working on the other houses. She glanced over her shoulder at the Juggler and saw him looking sharply around, his changeable eyes moving, moving, his thin pale face saying nothing. He saw her watching and shook his head slightly.

Inside the house the walls had been washed down and the bright colors of the murals glowed like jewels in the light from short tubes that had replaced the oil lamps. The thissik herding them along were small creatures, dressed in grey overalls that concealed most of their bodies except the long tapering tails held rigidly erect. Each thissik held a strange crooked rod in one hand. The sailors avoided these, rounding their shoulders and pulling in their arms whenever one of the thissik moved past. *Weapons*, she thought.

In the Day court all the benches had been moved out, leaving it desolate except for the gently rippling pool in the center. At the far end of the room the kala-shell panels were painted over, but glow tubes lit that end with bright red light. A thissik sat there at a delicate shell table. His pointed ear tips looked frosted and the short plush on his face was paler than that of their guards. Behind him were banks of machines and several sturdier tables

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covered with untidy piles of paper. He said something to one of the guards in a high squeal, oscillating rapidly between high and lower notes. At times his mouth moved but no apparent sound came out. The guard answered with a brief burst of the same sort of sound. Then the Elder turned his large round eyes on the captives. "I am Keeper. Who of you iss masster?" He spoke Parshi with a strong hissing accent and an occasional hesitation as he searched for a word.

"Me!" Captain Korl took a step forward, stopping abruptly when a guard hissed and jabbed at him with the crooked rod. He was big, powerful-looking, but his belly strained the seams of his tunic and bulged over his wide leather belt. His elaborately ringletted black hair was streaked with grey as was his bushy beard and moustache. His face was seamed and craggy, a ruin of power. Gleia wondered if he was the one who'd tried to harpoon Jevati. He looked capable of it.

"I'm my own man." Shounach stepped apart from the sailors, ignoring Korl's malevolent scowl.

"I also. I speak for myself," Gleia said hastily. She moved as far as she could from the sullen crewmen.

The Keeper exchanged a rapid set of questions and answers with the guard then turned back. His eyes flicked over the line and stopped on Shounach. "That seems reasonable. Kneel now. All of you."

Gleia hesitated. Shounach's hand came down hard on her shoulder, pushing her down with him as he knelt. She smoothed out a wrinkle under her knee and waited, wondering what was coming. Without warning one of the sailors jumped up and ran cursing at the Keeper. A guard flipped up his rod. The other sailors scrambled desperately away from the berserker as a cone of light licked out from the rod. He was silhouetted like a black doll against the crimson light then was gone, wiped away.

"It iss to be hoped the resst of you will not be sstupid." The Keeper picked up a dull grey metal ring. At one side it had two trapezoidal lumps. He let the ring dangle from one very small hand. You are now . . ." He hesitated, looked down at the ring, then back at them. His tail began jerking back and forth, the tip moving like a pinkish pendulum behind his head. "You are now slaves. The People of ship Thelar. . ." His mouth tightened and his face looked suddenly bleak. "We are here much against our will and our desires, but here we are and here we must stay." He spoke very slowly, the tips of his ears twitching slightly, the tip of

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his tail slowing and moving into a small circle. His hissing accent had diminished until his sibilants were barely noticeable. "We must build our lives here. You will help make these houses liveable for us. The guards will move behind you and place these rings about your necks. Anyone causing trouble will be removed immediately. By removed I mean what you have just seen. We have neither time nor inclination to tolerate fools."

Two of the guards slipped medallion chains over their heads and dropped them onto the table. Then they took the rings and walked behind the line of captives fitting a ring about each neck. The locks snapped home with small sharp clicks. A third guard circled wide around them and stopped a little over a body length from them. The ringers picked up their medallions, put them back on, then stood beside the Keeper.

"You may sstand." The Keeper's sibilants were beginning to trouble him again. He sounded tired in the way a man will be tired after expending himself for too many days in a battle where even the winners lose. The silver tufts on his ear points twitched as he folded small fine hands on the table in front of him. "For honor'ss ssake I sspeak." His large eyes closed slowly then opened again, sinking back in the loose folds of pale skin that pleated around them. His voice was firmer when he continued. "We are free traders whose ship was our life. That is over. Yet we still exist, and existing, must adapt. We are under pressure of time and need, and must do things . . . things we find abhorrent." His eyes moved slowly along the line of men, stopped at Gleia. He examined her, then seemed to shift uneasily in his chair. Then he faced Shounach. His pale tongue touched lightly at thin lips and the tail tip began to jerk erratically. He looked puzzled. Then he straightened his narrow shoulders and turned back to Korl. "The collars you wear limit you three ways." He tapped the table top with the nail of his forefinger. In the silence the small click sounded overloud. Gleia started; one foot scraped across the floor tiles. The Keeper's eyes turned briefly toward her then slid away. "One. You may not approach any thissik closer than one body length." The nail tapped again, twice this time. "Two. You may not go farther than one hundred body lengths from this house. Three. You may not seek to remove the collars without the key that is kept on my person."

Once again he paused and moved his eyes down the line, stopping briefly on each face though he skipped rapidly over Gleia and paused longer on Shounach. "It is to be hoped you are less

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stupid than that man," he told them. "One. If any of you seek to approach a thissik, you will feel pain that increases as you move closer. A demonstration." He waved a guard forward.

As the small grey figure came up to them, the pain was like a minor burn at first, but increased in intensity until it became unbearable. Gleia backed away then screamed as she passed the limit of the thissik behind her. She crouched, arms crossed tight against her breasts, rocking and moaning.

Then the pain was gone. The guard was back beside the Keeper who waited until the captives had recovered then went on. "Two. If you attempt to go beyond the tether limit, the pain will return. If you endure this and press further, at one hundred fifty body lengths the collar will explode, neatly removing your throat."

Gleia glanced sharply at the alien face. She thought she heard a touch of grim humor behind the even words. For a brief moment he reminded her of Temokeuu. She put the idea aside for later consideration and continued listening.

"Three. If you attempt to remove the collar whether by torch, saw, or lock pick, the collar will explode." He fitted fingertip to fingertip with neat precision and contemplated the result. "Once the houses are ready and the contents retrieved from our . . . from where they are, there will be no more need of your services. You will be free of the collars."

He didn't look at us, Gleia thought. *He would not mention the word* ship *in connection with freeing us.* She felt a chill. There were a lot of ways to read his last statement, most of them not comforting to think about. She rubbed at her arm as she watched the Keeper lean back, some of the stiffness passing from his small body. *He looks so terribly tired,* she thought.

The guards herded them out of the Endhouse into a red dusk. It was Horli-set. Overhead, the two moons Aab and Zeb were on the point of kissing, their pale ghosts gradually beginning to glow as the sky darkened. A number of small boats were tied to the pier, dwarfed by the black silhouette of the dhoura. Gleia touched the cold metal at her throat. Without that . . . She sighed and trudged along behind the Captain's broad back.

The new captives were taken into the second house, moved through dusty airless corridors, then directed through a wide doorway into a long narrow room with grilled windows marching down one side. A number of men lay about on the floor, boneweary after a long day's hard labor. Most of them were already asleep. At the base of the unpierced side wall a long trench was

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half-full of water. The trench passed under the far wall but a grill had been fitted over the opening so that the men inside could not get out.

The heavy door slammed shut behind them. Gleia looked around and shivered, a chill of fear raising the hairs along her spine. She was the only woman in the place.

"Take this." Shounach's voice was a thread of sound as he pressed a hard object against her back. She reached around and found the hilt of a knife. She moved a little way away from him, then glanced back. His face was a pale mask, cool and indifferent. As he walked away, she turned to watch the Captain.

Korl had appropriated the corner nearest the door, evicting the sleeping men already in possession. He and his crew were standing in a muttering huddle. She shivered once more as their eyes repeatedly flicked over her. She looked about for the Juggler. He was leaning casually against the wall near one of the last windows. The other men were negligible, most of them not even awake. Korl and Shounach. One at each end of the room. Two poles of power. Gleia moved her fingers on the hilt of the knife now hidden in the folds of her cafta. *You make your choice,* she thought. *And then you pay the price.* She swallowed, feeling a little sick at losing the integrity of body that six standard years of peace had given back to her. Keeping the knife hidden she turned her back on Korl and began moving toward Shounach.

A meaty hand came down hard on her shoulder and swung her around. "You goin' the wrong way," Korl said.

"Take your hand off." She kept her voice calm, tried to speak with cool contempt.

His fingers tightened on her shoulder. With a chuckle he pushed her toward his watching men. "That skinny nothing not for a nice little thief."

Gleia brought the knife up, slashed at his arm and whirled away as he howled with pain and slapped at her head, spraying drops of blood over several startled sleepers. Gleia kept the knife down and danced back, watching his hands.

Korl's eyes narrowed. He looked at the blood still dripping from his arm then at her as she stood holding the knife with a street-fighter's grip. He grinned and slipped off the leather shipmaster's vest. "Little cat," he said and flicked the end of the vest at her head.

Gleia ducked and twisted past the vest, slashed with the knife and was away before his hand could close on her. She'd opened a

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deep cut on his arm. He looked at it, then roared and charged at her, counting on his strength and reach to outmatch her knife. Gleia danced back then dived under his arms, opened a cut on his leg, then ran full out, leaped over a watcher and stopped in a small open space. Korl staggered, then jumped around. He was between her and Shounach, but the grin was gone from his seamed face. He began moving toward her, far more cautiously this time. Gleia retreated step by step not daring to take her eyes from him. She began to sweat, wondered how close she was getting to the crew. Korl's eyes began to shine with anticipation.

He stopped suddenly. "Juggler." His voice was hoarse and he was breathing heavily. "Where you stand in this?"

"Nowhere." The deep voice was cool and disinterested.

"Do I watch my back?"

"I'm not moving. Read that how you want."

Korl grunted. He flicked the vest at Gleia's head and came at her in a crouch when she leaped back. He flicked it again. She stumbled over a watcher and nearly went down, scrambled frantically and managed to tear free when his hand closed on the sleeve of her cafta. She left the sleeve in his hand.

The Captain was panting, sweat was streaming down his face and the cut on his leg was bothering him. He was moving slower. She tried passing him again but misread the crouch. His hand closed on her ankle. Panting and terrified, she slashed repeatedly at his hand, wrenched her foot loose and rolled desperately away.

The Captain shook the blood off his hand. He had trouble closing his fingers into a fist.

Gleia got to her feet and pushed at the hair plastered by her sweat to the skin of her face. Eyes on the Captain, she edged along the wall toward the Juggler. She mopped at her face and let her shoulders sag. Before her eyes dropped she saw his begin to shine again. She stepped clumsily back and bumped into the wall. Then darted at him low and fast, slashing at his heel just above the back of his sandal. As he crashed to the floor she was up and running.

Breathing hard she stopped in front of the Juggler. "Well?"

"Good job," he said calmly. "Companion?"

She nodded briskly. "Companion." Handing him the knife, she moved into the corner and sat down, feeling every wrench and bruise now that the tension of the fight was passing away.

Korl was groaning and clutching at his leg. His men watched, then one of them walked quietly over to him, a skeletal grey

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shadow, an emptiness in the shape of a man. He knelt and examined the hamstrung leg, then without a word stood, stooped, and plunged a knife into the Captain's neck. With the same lack of emotion he cleaned the knife on the Captain's shoulder, resheathed it, and walked heavily back to the corner and the watching crewmen.

Gleia closed her eyes but still saw the spurt of blood. "Not even passion," she murmured. "Like a butcher."

Shounach eased himself down beside her. "What does it matter once a man is dead how he got that way?"

Gleia stared. Then she looked down at trembling fingers. "It has to matter."

There was a clear space around them. The crew was still huddled together at the other end of the room and the others had drawn away. Shounach was sitting as he had the first time she'd seen him, knees drawn up, long clever hands resting lightly on the knees. She turned her head away. The glow tubes went out suddenly, plunging the room into a darkness filled with the breathing of tired men, the breathing of the man beside her. Through the window just beyond her feet in the wall that made a corner with the one behind her back, Gleia saw suddenly bright stars in an ill-omened shape. The Crow. She shivered and moved closer to Shounach. "The Empty Man. What's wrong with him?"

Shounach scratched at his chin, working his fingers through a two-day stubble. "Addict," he murmured. "Ranga Eye. Saw him with it a few days back."

"It ate him?"

"He's lasted longer than most from what I've heard."

She swallowed. "You recognized what it was. Have you ever . . ."

"Once."

She watched the Crow's beak dip out of sight, remembering the egg-shaped crystal that had tripped her up one morning in a street in Carhenas, remembering the images it brought to shimmer around her, butterfly people wheeling and dipping under a golden sun, glorious enticing images that had nearly sucked the soul out of her body. Had nearly eaten her like the Eye had eaten the Empty Man. "I found an Eye when I was still bonded," she whispered, speaking out of a need she couldn't define.

His fingers stroked over the two brands that marked her cheek. "Dangerous for a bonder."

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She closed her hand over his and pulled it away. "Deadly."

"What happened to it?" When she didn't answer, he said, "Did you sell it to buy your bond?"

"No. How could I? Who'd buy such a thing from a branded thief? I threw it away."

"Why? How?" There was a cool skepticism in the barely audible words.

"It tried to own me. All my life I've fought to keep a piece of myself for myself." The whispered exchange had a strange soothing quality. She found it absurdly easy to say things to the dark form beside her that she'd never spoken of before, even to Temokeuu. "The beauty of it. You know."

He hesitated then said slowly, "Yes. I know."

"Everything around me was so ugly. It would have been easy to give in, except . . ."

"It would have eaten you."

"Yes."

"You surprise me."

"Some things cost too much. You must know that. *You* broke free."

He was silent a long time. At first she thought he wasn't going to say anything. She turned back to the window, feeling better as the Crow's tail inched down behind the sill. "I've had training to resist such things," he said finally.

"Shounach?"

"What is it?"

"Do we stay awake all night?"

"How do you feel?"

"A bit sore. Otherwise all right."

"Feel up to taking first watch?"

"Yes. Go to sleep. I'll wake you at Zebset."

Shounach shook her awake. She opened her eyes and started when she saw how light it was. "It's late."

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet. She turned slowly, looking around. The room was empty except for two thissik standing by Korl's body. "Where are the others?"

"Sent to work. The thissik on the left speaks some Parshi. When they saw the body, they wanted to know what happened. Captain's crew told them."

"I can imagine what they said. What about you?"

"No one was asking me."

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"Why didn't you wake me?"

"You were tired. Might as well sleep."

The thissik finished the examination of the body and came over to them. "You come," one of them said. He pointed at the door. "To Keeper place."

Thissik went in and out of the Day court ignoring the two standing by the shell table. When the Keeper finally appeared he looked wearier than ever. He moved slowly past them and sat behind the table. "A man is dead." He straightened his back. Gleia felt her own back ache when she saw the effort he put into that small movement. "We were told you killed him."

"No." Shounach smoothed his hand over the side of his bag. "Putting a woman in with two dozen men was idiotic. Bound to cause trouble."

"I don't know your customs." The Keeper's hands twitched and his eyes turned restlessly about the room avoiding Gleia. With a quiet dignity, he said, "Whatever the cause, a man is dead at your hands, Juggler."

Gleia was tired of being ignored. Without waiting for Shounach's answer she burst out. "That's wrong. He didn't touch the man. After I bested him, one of his own crew finished Korl."

"The woman fought the man?" The thissik shifted uneasily. The momentary calm he had acquired left him as she spoke. He still would neither look at her nor speak to her. He seemed to have trouble even speaking about her.

"Yes, I fought him," she snapped. "I didn't feel like being mauled about by that . . ." Her lips closed over the words she wanted to use. Temokeuu had finished what the Madarmen had started, giving her a certain fastidiousness about the language she used. "I didn't kill him. Why should I? Hamstrung he was no danger to me. Ask your own men. Two cuts on his arm, deep cuts on the back of a hand, cut on his leg, cut across his heel. Those are my marks. The neck stab was a present from his crew."

The Keeper's ears twitched. The tip of his tail moved over the tiled floor, scraping slowly at the small bright squares. Once again he straightened his slumping body and spoke to the guards in the squealing whistling thissik tongue. He listened intently to the reply then stared down at the table, a small thin forefinger moving idly over the translucent sections of shell cemented together to make the table top. The tip of his tail tapped rapidly at the tiles. At last he sighed and leaned back in the chair. "Do you

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confirm, Juggler?" When Shounach spoke his brief affirmative, he nodded. "To prevent more trouble, the woman will be housed apart."

Gleia laced her fingers through Shounach's. "I've chosen this man," she said firmly. "Let him be lodged with me." She felt a flicker of amusement at the annoyance in the Keeper's weary face. His expressive tail was jerking about like an agitated snake. Her voice bubbled with that amusement when she spoke again. "You wouldn't be bothered by me then; he could do the talking."

The Keeper's mouth twitched but he quickly suppressed the smile. "An extraordinarily convincing argument," he murmured. His tail jerked upright, the tip swaying gently just above the top of his head. After his momentary lapse in courtesy when he responded to Gleia almost directly, he was very much on his dignity. "The woman will cover her face in the presence of the thissik. She will not speak to the thissik. You both will work. The guard will direct. If there is any more difficulty, you will speak, Juggler. The woman will not come here again." Without waiting for an answer he put his hands flat on the table and pushed himself erect with some difficulty then marched past them tail held high.

As they followed the guard out of Endhouse, Gleia glanced idly toward the pier. She gasped, then broke away and ran down the slope into the arms of one of the seaborn waiting there. "Tetaki-my-brother, what happened? How'd the thissik get you?" Her eyes moved over the startled faces of the seaborn. "Mladi? Drazeuu? Chekisuu? And the rest of you. Can't say I'm glad to see you here and ornamented like me." She tapped her finger against one of the ring weights.

Tetaki hugged her, then grinned. "In the middle of trouble as usual, Gleia-my-sister. I was almost expecting you to show up." He touched the ring around her throat, scowling to hide his distress. "This is worse than that." He stroked a finger across the thief brand on her cheek. "The thissik weren't in any mood to honor embassies. Before I could open my mouth they had the collars on us." He glanced past her. "Your escort is getting impatient." His arm about her shoulders, he walked her back down the pier. "I saw Jevati last night," he murmured. "When the thissik took you she went deep and came straight here."

Weak with relief, Gleia stumbled and would have fallen except for his supporting arm. "She must have been worn to a thread." She looked up the slope at the agitated guard. "What are you

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doing for them?"

"Salvaging material from the star ship. They herd us out there in the morning, bring us back just before Horliset."

She stopped at the end of the pier, turned, put her hand on his arm. "If I can, I'll promote a swim around Horliset." She grinned. "I've got a wierd edge. The thissik have got the most peculiar attitude toward women."

"Take care." He stepped away from her and strolled back to the others as she returned to Shounach and the guard.

Tail switching back and forth in very evident annoyance the guard marched along the path kicking up clouds of powdery ash. Shounach scowled at her. "That was a damn fool thing to do. You might have been killed."

Gleia smiled at the guard's stiff back and twitching tail. "Would they shoot a woman?"

"Don't press your luck. Who's your fish friend?"

"My brother. She giggled at his grunt of disbelief. "Adopted, of course." Her eyes narrowed. She licked her lips and spoke slowly and very clearly, her voice deliberately pitched to reach the guard's ears. "Our father is a very important man among the seaborn. When he hears about this . . ." She broke off with a little cry of pain as Shounach's fingers closed hard around her arm. "What . . ."

He looked disgusted. "Stupid," he muttered. "Why not just beg them to burn you?"

"Oh damn." She rubbed at the bruise on her arm feeling as stupid as he'd named her. "I didn't think of that."

The guard waited for them at the tumbled gateposts of Threehouse. "Stay here," he told Shounach. "I fetch tools."

Shounach watched him trot off, his short legs scissoring rapidly through clouds of pale grey powder ash. "How is your father supposed to learn about your captivity?"

Gleia brushed off one of the gate stones and sat down. She rubbed at the dust on her hands then sat watching her toes wiggle. After a minute she said, "Why should I tell you?"

"That's up to you." He stroked long fingers over the smooth material of the bag he never left behind and smiled blandly. "The guard just went in Endhouse. I wonder why he did that."

"You win." She stretched and patted a yawn away. "Tetaki told me a friend of mine is out there free. A seaborn. She saw me taken and followed."

"Good friend?"

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"Very. Like a sister."

"And she's gone to tell your father what has happened?"

"Temokeuu already knows they're here. Could be the Council is discussing them right now. Jevati—my friend—is staying around to see if she can find some way to help."

His fingers began tapping slowly on the material of the bag. "Has she any weapons?"

"A knife, all the seaborn carry knives. Why do you take that bag with you all the time?"

His mouth curved up. He dipped into the bag and pulled out two shimmering blue spheres. He tossed one into the air, then the other. They caught and threw back sparks of Horli's crimson as he kept them moving in an easy rhythm. "The tools of my trade," he said. "Not that easy to replace." He let the balls drop into a hand and looked back down the path. "Our little friend has just come out of Endhouse. Not hurrying now." He slipped the spheres back in the bag.

"Think I've really wrecked things up?"

"Wait and see." He looked across the bay. "Your friends are in a boat heading out. Looks like they're on a longer tether than the rest of us."

"They have to be. They're bringing up things from the ship."

"Ah." He moved his fingers thoughtfully along the grey metal ring. "Ingenious things these. They let a handful of men completely control a much larger number." He chuckled. "To get them off we'd have to part the Keeper from the key. But we can't get close enough to take the key from him so we can get close enough to take the key. If you see my point." He wheeled suddenly and stared at her.

"Your friend!" "Jevati!" Their words crossed and both started laughing. He pulled her up off the stone and swung her around and around until she was breathless, then he set her back on her feet and smiled down at her. His thumb caressed her cheek, moving across and across the bond mark and the cancel. Then his mouth came down and moved softly on hers.

Gleia pulled away. She rubbed the back of her hand across her mouth. "Don't," she said. "I don't like it." She let her hand drop. "If it's a problem for you, I pay my dues," she said. "I won't enjoy it but that's never mattered much before."

The expression went out of his face. "I'm not that much in need," he said.

The day passed slowly. Gleia worked inside Threehouse digging

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at the ash that had drifted in through broken windows and shovelling it into sacks constructed from a tough coarse fabric that made her itch whenever it touched her skin. When one was full, she dragged it outside and Shounach carried it away. The thissik kept after them to work faster. They were permitted a short rest time and given a cold lunch at midday then went back to work under the nervous harassment of a new guard.

At Horliset Shounach laid down his shovel. "Gleia," he called. "Quitting time."

She tottered out of the building. "I ache all over," she moaned. "And look at my hands." She spread them out. Fluid from two broken blisters cut trails through layers of grime. "I've got to have a bath."

"Got an idea." He climbed the slope to the ruin where the guard was sitting. About midafternoon the thissik had gotten increasingly shrill and agitated. His tail had gone limp and started sweeping about in the powder ash. Eventually he'd retreated to the shattered building and spent the rest of the time crouched in a corner where the roof was still intact.

Gleia watched as they talked. At first the guard was stiffly unreceptive. Shounach waved his arms about. She couldn't tell what he was saying though the sound of his voice floated down to her. The guard turned his head from side to side; his tail twitched then seemed to sag. Shounach waited. Finally the guard shrilled a few words and turned his back on the Juggler.

Shounach trotted back to her, grinning, jumping nimbly from rock to rock. He stopped beside her. "Want to go for a swim?"

"Do you need to ask?"

Gleia splashed happily about in the shallow water. Her filthy cafta floated up around her but she ignored that and scrubbed at herself with handfuls of coarse bottom sand, ignoring also the stabs of pain from her blistered hands. She sighed with pleasure and watched Shounach paddling about a little further out. "This is a marvelous idea."

He splashed idly at the water. "Naturally."

She ran her stiffening hands through her hair, grimacing at the oily feel. "A little soap would be nice though."

"Greedy."

A hand touched her leg. She suppressed her start and looked down. The seaborn's body was a shadow by her feet, barely visible in the deepening twilight. She stretched and yawned. "Shounach my love, come help me scrub my back."

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The juggler splashed over to her. "What is it?" he muttered, lips barely moving. "Be careful. Sound carries over water." He scooped up a handful of sand and began rubbing at the material pulled tight over her shoulders.

"That feels good." She sighed, moving her back muscles under his hands. "I never asked. You speak the seaborn tongue?"

"I speak a lot of languages. Why?"

"Look down."

Keeping their bodies between him and the guard, Tetaki slid his head out of the water. "How you doin'?"

"They work us." She patted his cheek. "Forget the Parshi, Tetaki-my-brother. The sea-talk's better here. Besides you have trouble getting your mouth around some of our Parshi sounds." She switched languages and asked, "Any trouble about this morning?"

"The Keeper asked some questions. By the way, he knows sea-talk. So watch it. I said you were my adopted sister. You lost your parents when you were a baby and my family took you in. Thought you ought to know what I told him. Asked me about our father, how he stood among the seafolk. You been bragging?"

She sighed. "Some."

"Stupid."

"I've heard enough of that." She glanced up at Shounach who was rubbing lazily at her back.

"Think next time." Shounach straightened, stretched and took a look at the guard. "Our friend is starting to twitch."

Tetaki grinned. "Telling Gleia to think's a waste of time. Her mouth runs faster than her head."

"Fish!"

Shounach pinched her ear. "Shut up, Gleia. Tetaki, how much is left in the ship?"

"Hard to say. We've been bringing things up for the past seventeen days. Looks like quite a bit left."

"Mmh. What about weapons?"

"I'd say they got those out themselves. First thing." He wobbled as he changed position slightly. "I'm getting stiff. Anyway, I've got no idea what half that stuff we've pulled up is used for." He chuckled. "Talking about ideas, if you can figure a way of getting at the Keeper, Jevati's not collared."

Gleia glanced up at Shounach. His eyes were bright with amusement. "Great idea, Tetaki," he said.

The seaborn looked from one face to the other. "A bit late, I see.

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You figured out how we can reach him?"

"Sorry. You?"

"Not a glimmer." Tetaki scowled. "He's always surrounded by dozens of guards."

The guard's shrill hysterical summons brought Gleia to her feet. "Guard your hide and keep Jevati safe," she said.

His dagger teeth gleamed briefly then he slid beneath the water and faded away, a shadow lost amid shadows.

Shounach strolled into the middle of the room and stood looking around. When Gleia started to speak, he shook his head and put a finger to his lips.

She watched bewildered as he dug in his bag, pulled out a faceted yellow crystal and began tossing it idly in the air as he moved about the room. In one corner a deep basin was filled with clear salt water from the bay. It was about two meters wide and three long. He stopped beside it. "What's this?"

She crossed to him and looked thoughtfully at the slowly rippling surface of the water. She knelt, pushed up her sleeve, and thrust her arm into the water up to the elbow. A gentle current tugged at the arm. She pulled her arm out and shook the sleeve back down. "They must have fixed the windpumps." She settled back on her heels and watched his face. "It's a bed."

He raised his eyebrows then walked away, whistling softly, tossing the crystal up and down, watching the play of moonlight on its facets. Gleia sniffed. "Big man."

He laughed and finished his circuit of the room then moved past her to the barred windows in the end wall. He slipped the crystal on a ledge and came back to her.

"What was that all about?" she said.

He dropped beside her. "Checking to see if the thissik planted an ear or an eye on us."

"What?"

"Never mind. Any idea where the Keeper might sleep?"

She shook her head. "These houses are built to shelter a lot of people. Given Jaydugar's winters, it's better to build one big house, not a lot of little ones. At least when the people living there have some kind of ties. The seacoast cities on the mainland don't count. Too many strangers." After a moment's silence, she said, "You seem to know something about the thissik. That should give you more of an idea of where he could be than any knowledge of seaborn architecture."

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"Good point." He scratched at his chin and stared thoughtfully past her shoulder. "Trouble is, what I know doesn't fit this."

The door slammed open. Two thissik walked in. One approached Shounach and both carefully did not look at Gleia. "You are required, Juggler. Come." He turned and walked out, the other following.

Gleia trailed Shounach to the door. "Luck," she said finally. There were a hundred things she wanted to say, questions boiling in her brain, urgencies needing reassurance, but she closed her lips on them.

He looked amused, his changeable eyes twinkling as he smiled into her anxious face. "Don't worry," he said. He pulled the door shut behind him. She heard the bar chunk home and then the staccato clicks of his boots moving crisply down the corridor outside. She scuffed across the room and pressed her face against a windowgrill that let her see a short section of the pathway. After several minutes she saw the two thissik and Shounach heading toward the Endhouse. She stayed at the window a while after they passed out of sight, then moved restlessly about the shadowy room, kicking at the hem of the still soggy cafta.

She stripped the cafta off. There were three windows in the back wall. The glass in one was broken and a stream of cooling air was pouring through it. The window grills had a series of stubs at the top. She hung the cafta over a stub, spreading it out over broken window so the air coming in would dry it a little faster. Trailing her fingers over the fitted stone, she moved slowly along the wall to the third window.

The two moons were still behind the houseridge so that she couldn't see them, but they were beginning to lighten the gloom outside. In the west above the bit of Endhouse roof she could see a halo of red coming through the kala shell panels of the inner court. She stood watching the steady glow as the Crow slid into view and arced toward the western horizon. She shivered and moved slowly along the wall, stopping at the cafta to squeeze the cloth between thumb and forefinger. It was still wet. She looked around the room. It was filled with shadow, soft dark shadow hanging still and comfortable. In the corner the rippling water surface painted a net of reflected light on wall and ceiling while fragments of moonlight danced across it. She sighed and lowered herself into the water. The lightweb danced wildly on the wall and lines of light rippled in arcs around her body.

She lifted her head as the door opened and Shounach came in.

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He walked briskly to the center of the room, looked briefly at her. "You're very talkative." He shrugged the bag off his shoulder and lowered it to the floor, then dropped the dark bundle under his arm on top of it.

When she moved, the water danced again. She watched the web settle again then said, "What did he want?"

He squatted beside the bundle and began working knots loose. "Clothes for you. A veil. Some blankets." He began tossing things aside. "And someone stole the Ranga Eye from your Empty Man." Thrusting his hand into his mysterious bag, he began pulling out glassy blue spheres and a number of small rods.

"What's that for?"

"Bath's over. Climb out of there."

"Don't want to." She paddled to the side and propped herself up on crossed arms, watching him fit small rods together into a latticed pyramid.

"Modest?" He sounded amused.

Gleia wriggled with irritation. "Comfortable," she snapped.

"Too bad. I need you to bang on the door and get the two guards outside in here."

"Why?"

"You'll see."

"Do it yourself." Then she sighed. "Never mind, I'll do it." She rolled up onto the floor and shook out the thissik dress. Long Black. Soft. She ran fingers over the material, enjoying the silken feel. "Nice. What is it?"

"Later. Get them in here. I want to try something."

As she slid the dress over her head, she saw him touch the point of the pyramid. When her head came through the neck opening, red and yellow light was glowing upward. The juggler had settled himself behind the pyramid and was spreading an opaque white paint on his face.

She smoothed the dress down, excitement itching at her. Eyes sparkling, heart banging in her throat, she ran across the tiles and began kicking at the door, screaming for the guards. When the thissik guards stood in a narrow opening, she swept a hand around, pointing at the juggler. "He wants you."

Red and yellow light rose and fell at the juggler's feet. Glowing blue balls circled the white mask, their changing blues flickering across the heavy paint.

Two balls

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then four
doubling doubling again they were a circle of blue
glowing a blue halo shimmering blue pale
bright dark up and over never
stopping never sometimes many sometimes melting
away to two always changing
and the black rings around the juggler's eyes narrowed,
widened and the dark mouth curving up curving down
a blue ball unfolded
was a shimmering golden dragon swooping the circle
and was gone and another
was a jewel-bright dancer
and was gone and another was a
and was gone and another was
and was gone
and was
and

Gleia blinked. The two thissik were glassy-eyed, rigid. Shounach caught the balls that remained and set them carefully on the floor by his feet.

"Thissik." His voice was soft, extraordinarily gentle. "Put your weapons on the floor."

To Gleia's open-mouthed wonder, the guards bent stiffly and placed their rod-weapons on the floor.

"Pick them up." The whisper came hastily. Gleia saw Shounach frowning as he seemed to struggle against an invisible pull. The thissik obeyed with the same jerky movements. "Return to your posts and forget what has happened." He waited tensely until the door was shut again, then relaxed.

"Why'd you send them away?" Gleia sat on the floor watching him as he began cleaning the white from hands and face.

A corner of his mouth curled up. "Tough little creatures. Hope I got them out in time." He fingered the collar and his smile broadened. "How close would you want to get to them?"

She grimaced. "I get your point. Now tell me what all that was about."

"Information. Possibilities." He yawned. "You want a blanket over you tonight, you'll have to share these." He touched the bundle with his toe. "Since we're supposed to be paired. Trust me?"

Gleia shrugged. "It's that or shiver."

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Gleia woke shivering. She had rolled out of the blankets onto the tiled floor. Icy drafts from the broken window circled along the tiles. She jumped up and rubbed hands over her arms trying to warm them a little. Shounach was deeply asleep, traces of white visible along the line of his jaw. She wrinkled her nose at him and began pacing about the room, toes curled, walking on the sides of her feet.

Picking at the dead skin poking up from the broken blisters in her palms, she crossed the room and stood looking out the end window, the one with all its glass. Outside, the night was still and dark. Both moons had set. The Crouching Cat was low in the west, the two brilliant eyestars floating just above the horizon. *Late*, she thought. She pressed her face against the bars and glanced toward the Endhouse. There was a red glow shimmering above the roof.

Trembling with excitement, she ran to Shounach. She went down on her knees and began shaking him awake.

In one swift surge he was up, awake, frowning. "What is it?"

She sat back on her heels. "There's something I want to show you." Chuckling at the expression on his face she jumped up and fled back to the window. The red glow was still there. "Shounach!"

Yawning, wrapping the blanket about his long lean body, he came across to stand beside her. "What is it?"

"Look."

He leaned past her. "At what?"

"No. I want to know if it means the same thing to you. Look!"

She knew the moment he realized what the glow could mean. His body stiffened and his fingers closed around the bars, one hand on each side of her head. "I see."

"Finally." She ducked under his arm and ran across to the blanket still on the floor. Sitting down, she rubbed at her feet and watched Shounach's back. After a minute his hands came down and he turned to face her. "He's always tired," she said. In the faint light from the stars she could see his mouth twitch into a smile. He crossed the tiles with three quick strides and dropped on the blanket beside her.

"Think the Keeper's still working?" He unwound the blanket. "Come here before you freeze."

She stretched out beside him, beginning to feel warm again as his body heat reached her through the thissik dress. With the blanket beneath them and one tucked around them, the cold air

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was a pleasant nip rather than a bone-shaking chill. "I think it's the best chance we've got."

He was leaning on his elbow looking down at her, the end of the blanket pulled around his shoulders and bunched under his chin. "Well?"

"They've got the windpumps working."

"You said that before. Why repeat it?"

"That means they are using the seaborn waterways. Remember the pool in the Day court?" His eyes narrowed then he nodded. "There's a conduit that runs from there straight to the bay. A big one."

His eyes darkened. She couldn't see color, but that usually meant they were turning green or blue and he was feeling amused. "Leave me something to do, love, or I'll start feeling useless." His voice was filled with laughter.

She pushed the hair back off her face. "Plenty of problems for all would-be heroes. And . . ." She yawned. The warmth under the blanket was blending with the aftermath of her surge of excitement to make her sleepy. Her eyelids drooped. She snuggled against Shounach and drifted into a deep and dreamless sleep.

The next day dragged by. At Horliset Gleia and Shounach were barely talking to each other. Gleia flounced away and stood at water's edge, ignoring man and thissik until the guard ordered Shounach to fetch her. He wouldn't let them swim, just herded them back to Twohouse. They picked up two food trays and a jug of water, then he marched them to their room and slammed the door on them.

Gleia crossed to the window and pressed her face against the bars. Behind her she could hear Shounach stripping, then the splashing as he slid into the basin and began washing. She closed her eyes. "Juggler."

"What?" She heard a larger splash as he pulled himself out of the water.

She watched smuts and ash drift past the window. "At the end of the pool, toward the outside wall, there's a screen in slots. Pull it out."

She heard the slither of clothes as Shounach got dressed. Then he padded across to his tray and sat down. She heard him pour some water in a cup. "Big man," she sneered. She turned around. He was sitting with a plate on his lap, chewing placidly on a mouthful of cold fish. His eyes, ice grey, came up to meet hers

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then dropped to his plate. He went on eating.

Pushing impatiently at her greasy hair, Gleia stalked over to the basin. She untied her sandals and kicked them away, ripped off the veil and flung it aside, then lowered herself into the water.

The gentle current washed away the accumulation of grime and sweat, taking a large part of her irritation with them. She bobbed against the outlet, eyes closed, letting the water work the tension out of her muscles. Finally, she turned and began struggling with the screen.

With an impatient exclamation Shounach stalked over, jerked the screen out of the slots and tossed it aside. He thrust a hand at her. "Come out of there."

She splashed out and stood dripping on the tiles.

"Drowned rat." The green was back in his eyes.

Gleia plucked at the finely woven black material that clung with disconcerting fidelity to her body. "Wonder if this will shrink."

"No. Hang it up and it'll be dry in a few minutes."

Eyebrows raised, she dripped over to the bars. "How come you know so much about the thissik?" She stripped off the dress and pulled the cafta over her head. "Just who are you, Juggler?" The dress was a soggy heap by her feet. She picked it up and hung it over one of the stubs, then came back to him, pushing at her hair. "I'd kill for a jar of soap."

He was sitting, his back against the wall, his hands resting lightly on his knees, his eyes flickering between green and blue. "I'll remember that."

"Well?"

"I could spin a tale for you." He sounded comfortably drowsy. "Oddly enough I'd rather not."

"Oh." She settled in front of him, arms wrapped around her knees. The light was still good enough to let her see his face. It had a worn look as if time had rubbed away at the flesh until it was like very soft, very thin, very old leather, crossed and recrossed with hundreds of fine wrinkles. He had an unconscious arrogance, a sense of superiority so ingrained he'd never know it was there. Very much a loner. She could recognize her own kind. Could recognize a deliberate distancing. Allowing no one to creep inside his shell and touch the places where he was vulnerable.

She sighed and began examining the palms of her hands. The blisters were filming over with new tough skin. She picked at the dead skin until she'd peeled it all loose, then pulled her palms

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several times over her hair. She rubbed the palms together to work the hair oil into the rough, cracking skin. After a while she looked back at Shounach. "I twitch-talked to Tetaki when I went to stand by the water. Told him to get in here if he could."

"Twitch talk?"

"The seaborn do it." She smiled. "A good twitcher can put a year's history in a single wiggle." Shounach sniffed skeptically. "Well, maybe I'm exaggerating a little." She sighed. "Tetaki says I'm worse at it than a one summer wiggler with a bad case of stutters."

"It's the truth and you know it." Tetaki came out of the water. The faint light gleamed on nacreous needle teeth when he grinned at them.

Gleia swung around. "How was it?"

"A mess." His thin nose wrinkled with disgust. "Once I thought I'd have to go back. The conduit narrowed to a hole the size of my arm. But the plug was soft enough to dig through."

"What about the outlet? Any problems?"

"The screen was a little warped but I could move it." His light green eyes narrowed as he scanned her face. "I know you, Gleia-my-sister. What's this leading up to?"

Gleia started to rise then settled back. While she and Tetaki had been talking, Shounach had crossed the room and was looking out the window.

"Is the light on?"

Without answering he walked slowly back and stood looking down at them. "It's on," he said finally. "Too early to tell if he's sitting up to work. What's your situation, Tetaki? Could you get out around Zebset?"

"No problem. The thissik don't bother guarding us. They count on the collars to keep us around. Why?"

Gleia leaned forward. "The Day court lights were on past Zebset last night. We think the Keeper might be working late."

Tetaki's grin widened until it was no longer a grin but a snarl of rage. "Tonight," he hissed. "I want this off tonight." He pulled at the ring. Then his taut body folded in on itself. "They might just leave the lights on all night."

"Well, Tetaki-my-brother, that's why we need you. The Day court pool is full and it has the scroll-work screen around it. Swim up the conduit and look. Then let us know what you saw."

The seaborn closed his eyes. His breath grew harsh and irregular, then the gasps grew quieter as he calmed himself. "Sorry

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about that," he said. "But I'm not going to wait till Zebset. I'm going in as soon as the Crow's down."

"To look."

He laughed. "To look."

Shounach was a shadow in the shadow veils. Gleia prowled about, rubbing at her arms, more nervous than cold. She kicked at the ragged cafta swaying around her with a life of its own as the tattered cloth answered the strengthening breeze coming through the broken window. Both sleeves were gone, one torn off in the fight with Korl, the other cut away because one sleeve made her feel like a clown. It was heavy with ground-in dirt and greasy sweat and torn in a hundred places. The black thissik dress fluttered at the window. Gleia wandered over and took it down, looking briefly at the sky as she did.

The Crow's tail was still visible. *Half hour at least before he goes in,* she thought. She pulled the cafta off and dropped it on the floor then worked head and arms into the thissik dress, wiggled around searching for the sleeve holes, then smoothed the dress down over her body. As she pressed the front seam shut she said, "This closing they make. I wish I had it on all my caftas. I get so sick of those ties." She ran her hand along her side, enjoying the soft sensuous feel of the material. "No wrinkles," she said. "What do they make this cloth out of? Even avrishum needs ironing. Not that I've ever seen much avrishum." She waited. "Shounach?"

When he still didn't answer she turned and stood leaning back against the wall, watching him. Aab was floating over her shoulder now, sending through the window enough light to transform the sitting man into a statue of black and silver. Legs crossed, booted feet tucked up on his thighs. Eyes paled to a shimmery silver. Face with a soft unfocused look. The backs of his hands resting on his knees, hands relaxed, fingers curling upward. As she watched she began to feel the stillness that spread out from him to fill the room. She touched the edges of it and felt herself settling into a quiet peace where she felt one with the earth and the stones around her. She slid down and sat leaning against the wall stillness washed over her filled her expanded her without moving she touched him began to merge with him . . .

He moved and the stillness snapped back inside him.

"Why did you . . ." She spoke very slowly. Her mouth felt numb,

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unused to forming words.

His eyes narrowed. His body bent toward her. She sensed puzzlement and surprise in him. Then he said quietly, "I needed to consider the consequences of intervention."

"I don't understand." She shook her head, still feeling a little strange.

"Gleia . . ." He stopped, looked hesitant. That startled her; it seemed out of character. The moon was shining on his face, painting silver on his cheekbones and black in the lines running from nose to mouth. Then he straightened. "What do you think of the Keeper?" he said crisply.

Gleia rubbed a thumb along her upper lip. Then she shrugged. "He's a slaver, holding us here against our will. He sends out raiding parties capturing, even killing, people who've done him no harm."

"That all?"

A lock of hair fell across her face and she shoved it back impatiently. "No. Of course not. If you look from the other side, he's a man working under impossible pressures to save his people." She opened her hands and stared into the palms. "Not a man like Korl."

"Impossible pressures?"

The lock of hair fell down again; she slapped it back with a muttered exclamation. "I don't know what they are. How could I? What does that matter? Just look at the man!"

Shounach nodded. "A thissik free trader has five castes on board," he said slowly. "Engineering. Life support. Navigation. Administration. Trading. Each caste contains a minimum of four extended families but the traders are the only ones to leave the ship. Ever." There was a faint sadness in his voice, a remote compassion on his face. "I'd say there are over a thousand thissik on this Cern."

Gleia shook her head. "That has to be wrong. I've only seen a dozen altogether."

"In the rooms beyond the Day court I think you'd find row after row of dreaming thissik, waiting in improvised life support for the Keeper to prepare a place for them. A shelter." He laid stress on the last word. "They were born within ship's walls and expected to die there. A thousand years of culture drowned when that ship came down." He brooded a minute, eyes focused beyond her head. "I wonder if they'll make it. They're fortunate in their Keeper."

"The ones we've seen are . . ."

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"Traders, of course. They're better able to handle openness."

"Why that strange attitude toward females?"

He looked down at his hands. Again she sensed a sadness in him. "Rumor says there are fewer thissik born each generation, fewer fertile females. Their women are both adored and enslaved, kept in luxurious idleness."

She shivered. "I'd go crazy with boredom." With a yawn and a groan, she stretched arms and legs. "Talk about your impossible pressures. Shounach."

"What?"

"We can't kill him. That would be like . . . like cutting all their throats."

"Consequences of intervention."

"Fancy words for murder." She wrinkled her nose, then shook her head. "The Keeper's small and tired, but he's no fool. Jevati won't get near him when he's awake. Tetaki will have to use his knife. He's very good at throwing it."

"Would he insist on that?"

She rubbed her forehead then smoothed her hand back over her hair. "Tetaki's no killer." She laughed. "Except when he's trading."

"Mmmh. Would he trade with the thissik if he had a chance?"

Gleia grinned. "Yes."

"That's all? Just 'yes'? No qualifications?"

She giggled. "Wave a new market in front of Tetaki and watch him salivate." She hugged her arms across her breasts. "His mouth must be watering already over the things he's bringing up from the ship. Can you get the Keeper to listen?"

"I can try."

"Shounach the Juggler. So you juggle lives too." She yawned and closed her eyes. "This night is crawling. Where are you going after you get loose?"

"Here and there."

"Off world?"

"You say that with remarkable equanimity for a young woman in a low-level technology."

She chuckled drowsily. "Big words, big words. Some of the seaborn have forgotten less about their origins than the other sorts here. Temokeuu says it's because of long lives and a very stable culture."

"Your father?"

"You say that with remarkable equanimity," she murmured.

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"Some people consider my relationship with him sick and shameful, mammal consorting with fish."

"Affection transcends form," he said gravely.

"Affectation obscures sense." She snorted and opened her eyes. "Did you crash here too? Temokeuu told me about the . . ." She hesitated trying to remember just what the seaborn had said. "The way things are around our world and our suns. Like marshland trapped with quicksand, some places safe and others that twist and tear the starships until they are destroyed or tumble down on us." She pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around them. "Temokeuu says there are hundreds of different worlds out there. Is it like going from Cern to Cern? He says the distances the ships travel are so great I can't even begin to imagine them. Have you seen many worlds? Are they anything like Jaydugar? Tell me . . ."

"Slow down." He was laughing hard enough to break up and half swallow the words. "Later, Gleia," he managed. "Plenty of time later."

The bar chunked back and the door swung open. Tetaki looked in. "Come on," he said. "The only guard is half-asleep by the front gate."

He led them swiftly through a maze of corridors then ducked into a room. A section of the wall had been knocked to powder by a stone spat out during the eruption. Tetaki wriggled through and helped Gleia out. Shounach had more trouble, being both longer and wider than either of the other two, but he got out, leaving some skin on the wall stone.

Tetaki strolled down the slope and waited for them on the path. "The Keeper's in there all right, but he's not alone for very long," he said. "Thissik go in and out all the time. I spent almost a half hour there. He's sitting at a worktable, writing when he's not talking with other thissik." He shook his head. "We'll have to kill him fast, let Jevati get the key, and get out of there like a tri-seal with a cheksa on its tail."

"No! Tetaki, we can't kill him."

"How the hell else is Jevati going to get the key?"

"I'll take care of that," Shounach said quietly. "If you can get me in there."

Tetaki ran his eyes over Shounach's length. "How good are you underwater?"

"Good enough. If you'll provide a tow."

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Tetaki nodded. "That'd do it. You're right." He grinned suddenly. "What the hell. Be a shame to slaughter the poor little creature."

Night-black water slapped softly at the pier's stone pillars, throwing back flickers of moonlight. Aab was directly overhead, swimming in and out of thickening clouds, while Zeb hovered low in the western sky. The wind tugged persistently at Gleia's hair, lifting the heavy oily mass from her neck. She put her hand on Jevati's shoulder, shocked by her painful fragility. "You sure you want to do this?" She shook her head. "You look terrible."

Jevati grinned. "I could say the same." She wrinkled her nose. "You stink."

With a low laugh, Gleia pushed at her hair. "I know what you mean. When there's no breeze I even offend myself." She looked up at the dark almost invisible bulk of Endhouse. "You can't see the light from here, the cistern's in the way. Did Tetaki tell you?"

Jevati nodded.

A seaborn jumped down from the pier with a coil of rope in one hand. As Gleia and Jevati watched the rope was cut in two pieces, and loops worked in both ends of each piece. Shounach slipped his arms in the loops on one piece and began wading out from the shore.

"Come here, Gleia." Tetaki flipped the rope about, slapping it against his thigh. "Time to put you in harness." He slipped the loops over her arms and pulled them up to her shoulders. Then he tugged at the rope. "That hurt?"

"No. The sleeves keep it away from my skin." She moved her arms tentatively. "Feels peculiar."

Tetaki laughed softly. "You can stand that." He sobered. "You'll go in on your back. There's quite a current coming out. You'll have Vanni and Uvoi towing you. Don't try to help. Just relax. When you feel two jerks like this . . ." He tugged on the rope. "That means you're about under one of the standpipes. Find it, pull yourself up. Breathe. When you're ready, tug three times then three more." He looked past her. Gleia turned.

Shounach floated on his back. He was smiling and his eyes were darker than usual. *He's enjoying this,* she thought. He breathed deeply several times then took a normal breath and tugged on the rope. His body went smoothly under the water.

Gleia closed her eyes. She was terrified of shut-in places. She'd never told anyone, not even Temokeuu. The thought of going so

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far in the dark unable to breathe brought her close to panic. When she opened her eyes Tetaki, Jevati and the others were gone. Vanni and Uvoi stood quietly at her side waiting for her. She looked up at the moon, knowing she could wait here without shame. Tetaki would bring the key to her. But she couldn't do it. In spite of her terror, curiosity drove her to go. She had to SEE. She waded out, then lay on her back. When she was ready, she tugged on the rope and they took her down.

The glimmer of moonlight vanished too quickly and she was gliding through a blackness colder than death. She felt a tiny touch on her arm, then another, then hundreds more tickling at her skin. She almost panicked before she realized the touches had to be weeds growing on the walls. Her lungs began to hurt; blood pounded in her ears. She almost missed the double tug. It came again and she struggled up, feeling at the weedy top until she hit the edge of the opening. She got both hands on the edge and pulled her head up until she was gasping and spitting out water in the narrow circumference of the standpipe.

She stayed there until she felt cleansed, then breathed deep, breathed light, held her breath and signaled them to take her on. They pulled her back into the wet dark and the weeds fluttered about her again. Like fingers laughing. Mocking her.

The signal. More air. A precious faint light high above. And darkness. Black water. Weed. The chafing pull of the rope. A ghost of light. Flashes around her like tiny fish. Not fish. Reflections of red light on the twisting weed. Red light. Like swimming in blood. Brighter and brighter. She was arcing upwards, hands around her, helping her. Her head broke the surface gently as a leaf drifting up instead of down. Hands covered her mouth. Breathe in out through the nose. Then she was clinging to the edge of the pool. They were all there, Shounach, Tetaki and the other seaborn.

They waited. The thissik came in and out. The Keeper was seldom alone for more than five minutes. Finally the intervals between visits grew longer and longer. Still they waited. The glow tubes blinked out around the court leaving three still lighted by the work table. The Keeper was reading a paper and marking on it with a stylus, stopping every few minutes to sip at a cup sending up thin wavers of steam.

Shounach was up and over the screen in a quick smooth movement. Then he strolled toward the Keeper.

The thissik looked up at the small sound of the splashing water.

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His hand darted toward a small dark cube then drew back as he recognized his visitor. "Juggler." He smiled. "I've been expecting you, Starfox."

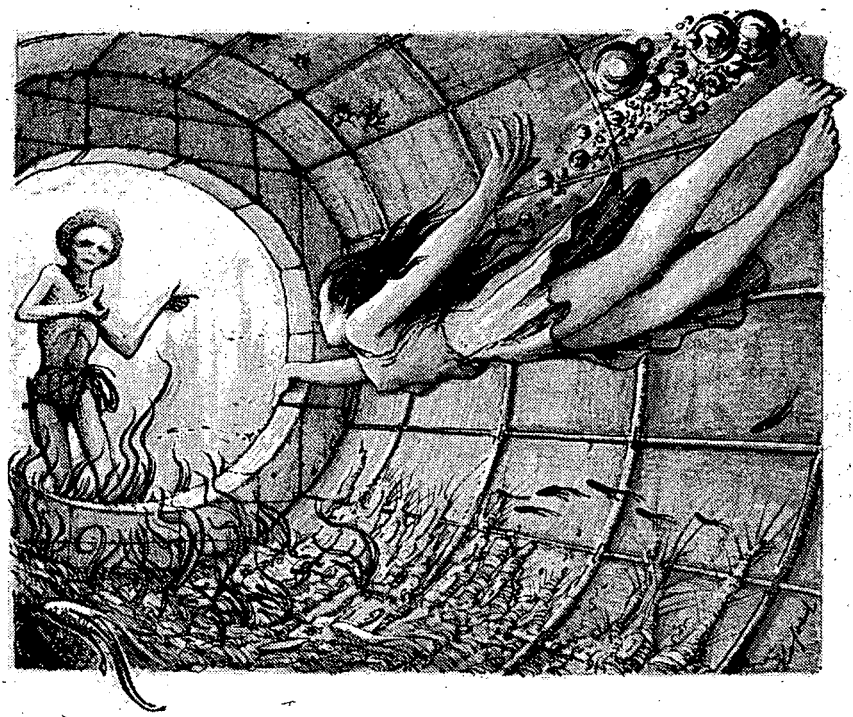
Shounach reached into his bag and pulled out two glowspheres. Smiling slightly, he began tossing them up and catching them. After several revolutions a third object circled with the spheres, a clear egg-shaped crystal that began sending out veils of soft color.

Gleia began to shudder until she hardly had strength enough to cling to the poolside. The Ranga Eye. *He stole it*, she thought. *He wanted the Eye. Shounach!* She felt sick.

"You wanted this," the Juggler said. The Eye left the circle and flew in a lazy arc toward the Keeper. His hands seemed to move of their own volition, reaching out, catching the eye. He looked down at what he held and could not look away.

Shounach slipped the glowspheres back in the bag. "Jevati," he said quietly.

Tetaki boosted her out of the pool and followed. The other sea-



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born surged out behind him, but Gleia didn't attempt to move.

"The key. What does it look like?" Jevati spoke in a hushed murmur.

"Small black rod. On a chain around his neck."

Jevati nodded. As she sped across the tiles toward the rigid Keeper, Shounach bent over the screen and took Gleia's hand. "Push," he said.

She stumbled over the screen and nearly fell. He caught her then stood looking down at her. "Almost over."

"Will there be a happy ending to our tale?"

"Ending?"

She snorted and backed away. "I'm not in the mood for ponderous platitudes."

His eyes burned blue and he nearly choked on stifled laughter.

Jevati came back with the key. When all the collars were off, Shounach dropped them into the pool. Then he crossed to the table where Tetaki was indulging his curiosity by poking through the papers and picking up and putting down the bits of instrumentation scattered among them.

"Want to leave? Or see if you can do a deal with the Keeper."

Tetaki laughed. "You need to ask? What about him? He wasn't anxious to listen the last time. I've had all the collaring I want."

"He'll listen."

Tetaki rubbed at his chin. "Worth a try. Can you wake him up a bit?"

Shounach leaned over the table and plucked the Eye from the Keeper's hands. The thissik screamed, then collapsed. Dipping his hand into the bag, Shounach brought out a black disc. He reached across the table and pressed the disc against the thissik's neck, held it there a few seconds, then pulled it away and stood watching.

The Keeper sighed, then sat up. He moved his eyes over the collarless seaborn, then looked at Shounach. "What now?"

"Up to you. Do we leave or talk a bit?"

"What did you give me?"

"Inaltaree. It'll wear off in about two hours. Then you'll sleep for twenty."

The Keeper groaned. "I . . ." He touched the papers in front of him. "I don't have twenty hours to spare."

Shounach's wide mouth curled into a slow smile. "Tetaki, here's a man you should understand. Proud as a seaborn. Won't take help."

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Tetaki rubbed his thumb across his fingertips. "Might buy himself some, if he works it right."

The Keeper straightened. His tail had been moving listlessly across the floor. It came up to a carefully non-committal angle. He touched fingertip to fingertip and let out a long slow breath. "Offer," he said crisply.

Gleia lowered herself onto the screen. "I think it's going to work," she murmured as she watched the animated exchange between the Keeper and Tetaki. The other seaborn threw in a word now and then, skillfully backing their leader. Shounach watched with a sardonic smile on his pale face, thoroughly enjoying the scene. Gleia touched her tongue to her upper lip then dropped her eyes to her hands. "How do you feel little fish?"

"Little tired, that's all. Fuss, fuss, worse than a mother." She sounded amused. "I'll rest when I get to Radnavar."

"You still have to make that journey?"

"Nothing's changed."

Gleia pushed at her filthy hair. When she glanced back at Shounach, he seemed to feel her looking at him and smiled at her. Then he went back to watching the lively bargainers. The argument was picking up momentum and gathering noise as it moved along. Gleia closed her eyes. Worlds on worlds opened up for her with Shounach, but there was no way Jevati could travel alone. "What happened to the *Dragonfish*?"

"As soon as they took off with you, I put the anchor over and bagged the sail. Unless the cable broke or some stickyfinger came along, it might even be there still. If not, plenty of boats at the pier."

"We'll need one anyway. I can't swim that far and you shouldn't." She pushed herself onto her feet. "With the current behind me I won't need towing. You go first."

Jevati's cool smooth fingertips touched Gleia's cheek in a brief caress. Then she was gone. Gleia looked a last time at Shounach, then eased her body into the water. She sucked in a breath and dived into the darkness.

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Dear Mr. Gardner:

Arizona, California, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia—a total of 19 states—each has a letter in common with each of the 49 remaining states, a property you claim to be unique to Maine.

It is true that Maine, with five letters, is the shortest name on the list, a fact which makes the property less likely. But Indiana is even more remarkable in the sense that it contains only four distinct letters.

Maine's uniqueness, as far as this property is concerned, is immediately suspect when the only state to share a boundary with Maine is considered. Even without considering any other states, Maine cannot be the unique answer when NEw hAMpshIre contains the same letters.

I enjoy your monthly puzzles immensely, and I usually turn to the puzzle immediately after purchasing my copy of *IA'sfm*. I especially enjoyed "The Postage Stamps of Philo Tate," with its final-solution-next-month variation. Perhaps we could see more of this in the future.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Anderson
Neshanic Station NJ

Many readers caught this mistake in question 6 of "Captain Tittlebaum's Test," in the February issue. Mr. Anderson correctly guessed what was inadvertently omitted from the question. It should have asked for the state with the fewest number of letters that shares a letter in common with each of the other 49 states. Another reader, Rick Humburg, of Hollywood, Florida, pointed out that A, I, and N appear in the name of every state, and that fifteen states contain all three letters. Sorry I goofed on that one!

—Martin Gardner

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I recall from reading my first issue of *IA'sfm* that you asked anyone interested in submitting material for publication to request a copy of your editorial policies first. I hereby make that request. [*I*

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have sent them. GHS]

Now then, since I've gotten the business part out of the way . . .

Congratulations are in order for you and the Good Doctor.

Congratulations for producing such a good magazine.

Congratulations on being so receptive to new talent.

Congratulations on not being stodgy and formal.

Congratulations on the Hugo.

Best of all—from my standpoint—congratulations on getting me to read it. I was never interested in SF mags till I saw the Good Doctor smiling down at me from the magazine rack at the neighborhood drug store.

Here's to continued success.

Yours truly,

Martin W. Novak
Kendall Park NJ

See the power of a nice smile.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and Mr. Scithers,

I have just finished reading my third issue of your magazine, and have finally gathered the courage to write some comments concerning same.

First, the things I don't like about the magazine. 1) Would it be too inconvenient to put order forms on a page that doesn't have something of interest, like the climax of a story, on the other side of the page? [*We'll try. But if you don't want to cut up your magazine, you can always copy the essential part of the form onto a blank sheet of paper and send that. GHS*] For example, in your January 1979 issue, if I want to order any of the anthologies edited by the Good Doctor, I either have to rip off the cover of the magazine, or lose the last page of the "The Second Law". Even if I didn't like the story (I do) it wouldn't be easy to decide which to mutilate. 2) Two-page illustrations are rarely successful because a good part of the illustration is hidden where it folds into the binding. As an example of what I mean see the illustration for "In the Country of the Blind, No One Can See." 3) Doesn't Dr. Asimov ever smile? I know it's trivial, but I also know that it scared me away from a couple of issues at the beginning. I mean, if the Good Doctor looks so grim about his own magazine, can it be a good magazine? Maybe you can get a good shot of Asimov grinning at one of his own puns.

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Second, the things I like about the magazine. Or rather, a few of the things I like about it, as it would take forever to list them all. 1) I have liked SF since I could read, but have always felt too timid to write letters or stories. All of a sudden comes a magazine that actively encourages both, and not just from famous people, but from the ordinary human. Great! Keep it up. 2) It is always a pleasure to learn a little about the authors of the stories, so keep those introductory paragraphs; they really add to the free and easy atmosphere of the magazine. 3) The stories. Mr. Scithers, you sure do deserve that Hugo, and I hope you continue to deserve and get them.

Lastly, a few questions. Do you have any back issues of the magazine? I would like to catch up on what I've been missing. Also, could I get the second issue of *Asimov's SF Adventure Magazine* without tearing apart my magazine to get the order form. [*See my comment above. GHS*]

Sincerely,

Paul Curry
Seattle WA

You bet I smile. All the time. But when I'm not smiling I don't look grim. I look thoughtful and intellectual.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sir:

I don't often write to a science fiction magazine, but I had to write and tell you of my enthusiasm on reading "Ker-Plop" in the January 1979 issue, which I did on the 19th, just two days ago. In fact, I turned right around and reread the story, something I have not done in years (I first saw SF in 1929, 50 years ago). The story impressed me so much that I began to compare it with others that had moved me on first impact: "Hobbyist," by Russell; "The Big Front Yard," by Simak; "The Figure," by Grendel; and perhaps the opening of the Lensmen series in *Astounding Stories*.

I am not entirely sure of the ecological impeccability of the author's spaceship, but the concept was breathtaking and the story was written in the "opening-out" style which I admire from Raccoona Sheldon's stories—big events start with small beginnings, like an oak growing from an acorn.

I am not sure whether I really want a sequel to "Ker-Plop"—both pro and con aspects appeal. On the one hand, he cleverly introduces just a hint of alienness in the story—who were the aliens and where

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did they fit into the ship's life; and of course one could have follow-up stories as various planet-populations were assimilated into the ship's life. On the other hand, maybe the story should be left alone so that each person could picture his own sequelae.

Aside from "Ker-Plop," I found "The Second Law" quite good, but a so-so ending. "Garbage" was negligible. I didn't get much out of Gunn's article. "The Last Gothic" was so-so. The remainder were pleasant but unmemorable.

So, in conclusion, keep 'em coming and every success to you.

Sincerely,

Edward L. Corton
Hillcrest Heights MD

You and I started at the same time and do I remember the impact the first part of "Galactic Patrol" made on me!

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Congratulations on receiving the Hugo Award described by Isaac Asimov in the January issue. I put the magazine in my husband's Christmas stocking specially, since his first science fiction story had just won honorable mention in a contest. He wrote it while taking a science fiction writing course taught by Milton Lomask at Catholic University. Now Gordon is thinking about "Exploring the Cosmos" at UNCC rather than commuting to Washington.

Please send the description of your story needs and discussion of manuscript format. The stamped Size 10 envelope is enclosed, addressed to my husband. [Done! GHS] Behind every good man, you know, there's a woman. I used to be The Enemy, as Isaac Asimov called English teachers; but after last night's reading of "The Castaways," I am only marooned.

Sincerely,

Rebecca S. Schenck
Charlotte NC

Only "The Enemy" as an abstract class, I assure you. Individually, I cherish you, and as tightly as possible.

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear George,

Give somebody a Hugo and see what happens? They get all serious about things, stop printing limericks and spend much of the ensuing issue patting each other on the back. Your January issue was enjoyable but for the lack of verse and the editorial.

Goulart is good anytime. Can't you get him to serialize something in *IA'sfm*? "Garbage" was the best story of the ish, followed by the ridiculously titled "Ker-Plop." (The title led me to expect something wholly different than what Reynolds presented, especially after I reread Goulart.)

The Longyear thing (is that his real name?) [Yes. GHS] is wearing thin. I couldn't really get interested in another episode. "The Last Gothic" was lovely. A very good way to get a parody of the Gothic published. The story is, though, SF only in a superficial way. Perhaps it belonged in a type of mystery magazine that doesn't at present exist. *Speculative Mystery Monthly*? Then again, maybe that's what *IA'sfm* is evolving into.

I was pleased to read Keith Minnion's letter regarding artwork. Honestly, guys, your artwork is better than what gets run in *Analog* (covers excepted), *Galaxy* (!) or any of your other competitors. But compared to the sort of illustrations to be found in pulp magazines of thirty to forty years ago, the stuff isn't really very good. Maybe it's the presentation. I know it would be expensive, but if you ran the full-page artwork on glossy inserts (like the Kent cigarette ads in your earlier issues), said artwork would not only look better, but would be extractable for framing at home.

Another pet peeve: Do you have to litter your covers with so many big, colorful letters, and isn't there any way to incorporate that godawful code box (or whatever you call it) into the logo, thereby restricting the overall cover pollution? You've had only one really good cover so far (Vol. 2 No. 5). The next cover, by George Barr, was sort of interesting, but the color scheme was terrible.

Yours,

Forrest Fusco, Jr.
Toronto, Ontario

There was no "patting each other on the back." I patted George, yes, because he deserved it, but he just blushed prettily and did not pat me back.

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Mr. Scithers,

I would definitely think twice about submitting my "marvelous" efforts to a magazine which published only such stories as "Ker-Plop" (January '79). That was a really good story, and so well written! But certainly I could compete with "Garbage" (same issue) which was exactly that! Really Mr. Scithers! How did that get past your critical eye?

While "Garbage" displeased me as a reader, it gave me great hope as a writer. If that got published, then surely there is hope for me! Regardless of your opinion of this offering, I hope you will do better than "Garbage" in future issues. "Ker-Plop" deserved better company. But then, you are the editor, and I'm just a reader with a collection of rejection slips.

Sincerely,

S. Yeager Thorndike

A number of writers have gotten their start by saying, "If they can print that garbage . . ." Good luck!

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I must confess that I had many qualms about writing to a magazine. But the latest issue of *IA'sfm* was so superb that I felt I must add my congratulations to the many you already receive. The issue I am speaking of is the January 1979 issue. I read with avid enthusiasm the editorial by the Good Doctor, about which I can only say that I look forward to more words of wisdom in this column. I also enjoy the biographies of SF artists. After going through the book section, the convention calender, and the puzzle, I got down to the serious reading.

My favorite story was "In the Country of the Blind, No One Can See." I like to read science fiction that is not all gadgets and beasties. The rest were all so close that I could not possibly pick a second. I look forward to another story by Barry Longyear. His series about Lord Allenby and the people of Momus gets better with each story. I could not help laughing during "The Last Gothic." Also enjoyed "Garbage," and was thoroughly engrossed in "Ker-Plop." What have I forgotten? Oh yes, "The Castaways." I think you should warn us when we're about to read an awful pun. Of course, this one was too guessable and lacked the class (if a pun can have class) of your earlier ones.

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Good luck with your magazine! I look forward to the days when your magazine appears in my box.

Yours truly,

Kathy Burner
Bothell WA

Never have qualms. We don't bite. I may nuzzle a little.
—Isaac Asimov

Gentlemen:

Now you've gone and done it! It was distracting enough to have three issues of your magnificent mag arrive within a very short interval: now someone's asking for science-fact articles. It's enough to drive an anxiety-ridden graduate student to strong puns. (Not included.)

Turn about being fair play, I will now overwhelm you with more information than you might really wish to acquire.

First: The three issues. I had subscribed to "the magazine" through a fund-raising drive which benefits the local school-district scholarship fund. After the usual "six-week wait," I received my first subscription issue, that of January 1979. A week later, the November/December issue came, and was welcomed with shrieks of joy. Notice duly taken that the mag was now monthly, I determined to extend my subscription for six months, so that subsequent renewals could be channeled through the scholarship fund. At that time I also determined to write a letter, my very first virgin fan letter, singing your praises and explaining why the renewal was short-term. Today I received the February issue, an embarrassment of riches, and knew that I would have no peace until I had indeed dashed off my epistle. (I can also see that this jag will require three stamps: one for this letter, one for the subscription dept., and one for the "other magazine" issue #2. Oh, the budget!) Please don't send the March issue until mid-February!

Second: how did I come to pick up the magazine? A bit differently from others whose accounts have appeared recently. This past summer, at Cornell University, I saw the first issue of "the other magazine" in the student union, and purchased it on the strength of Good Doctor's name. (Besides, it was raining.) In that issue, I was delighted to see an ad for "this magazine." In haunting the newsstands for more of the "other mag," I purchased two issues of "this mag," intending to subscribe when the above-mentioned drive oc-

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curred in the fall. I love them all. They set my blood to singing, in ways I thought were gone as victims of "growing up." Someone in the Feb. issue Letters complains about "To Touch the Stranger's Mind," pointing out that the theme is an old one. Well, so is love and so is death, and so are all the other challenges and liable-to-cliche adventures of human beings. What is needed is to look at these afresh, with the conviction of new lovers who *know* that they have invented emotion. Your mags, both of them, spread a fresh feast for the spirit.

Third: a question for Mr. Scithers. Why do you want to know "What is the lowest age at which people . . . enjoy reading the magazine?" Surely you are not going to change your policies to attract more immature readers? Age is between the ears, sir, not on the calendar, as the Good Doctor so richly exemplifies.

Enough. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Irwin Singer
Wynnewood PA

No, no, you miss the point. It is not that we want to lower the magazine to fit the age. We want to know the youngest reader who has raised his age to fit the magazine, so to speak, so we can be proud of him.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sirs:

Aw, com'on you guys!

You can be more creative than to publish a sexist cover (November/December '78), showing a bare-bodied woman in an impractical spacesuit, wearing brassiere (!) and make-up (!) straight from the '50s.

In every issue I've read every word because your magazine presents fresh, new approaches to possible social and political futures. Someone needs to inform your illustrator(s) that the old stereotypes of women are no longer credible (beauty and the beast; the female spacer who does all the cooking and homemaking; yecht!).

Someone needs to tell George Barr there is a woman's movement toward practicality and rationality regardless of sex or, better yet, why not require him as penance to read Melisa Michaels (January '79), Jo Clayton (February '79), or Ginger Kaderabek (July/August '78)!

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A sci-fi teacher,

Patricia A. Kyle
Charlotte NC

Oh, dear, I'm never going to make it. I'm a convinced feminist but I do seem to react to those old-fashioned sexist things like accentuated curves. Horrid of me, but what can I do?

—Isaac Asimov

We're always happy to see your letters, which should go to Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101. (Subscriptions, changes of address, and problems about subscriptions should go to an entirely different address: Box 1855 GPO, New York NY 10001.)

Manuscripts (which should go to Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101, and please send for our sheet on format and needs first!) are also welcome—but please understand that we've been getting about 30 to 45 manuscripts every day (that's almost 1,000 a month), while you can tell by the contents of this issue about how many we buy a month. So, while every successful writer begins as an unpublished hopeful, and while we spend a great deal of time and effort looking for good first stories, you are up against a lot of competition. If we do send your first (or second or . . .) story back, remember Scithers's Saving Rule: editors don't reject writers; they just reject pieces of paper that have words typed on them.

—George H. Scithers

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